

**AN EVALUATION OF STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES IN  
OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING AT THE UNIVERSITY  
OF NAMIBIA**

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**FEBRUARY 2005**

## **DECLARATION**

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this dissertation is my own original work and has not previously in its entirety or in part been submitted at any University for a degree.

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**SIGNATURE**

**FEBRUARY 2005**

**DATE**

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## **SUMMARY**

Distance education and open and flexible learning policies have done much to extend accessibility to higher education throughout the world. However, distance education is not just a move away from learning in the classroom. It is a complete paradigm shift and when delivering learning materials outside the classroom across any distance, it is important that technologies and techniques support students. Against this background, the case has been made that the provision of student support services, according to the diverse needs and expectations of adult distance education students, should be an integral part of the provision of open and distance learning.

The focal point of this study was to evaluate student support services, provided at the northern campus of the University of Namibia, from a student perspective.

A combination of both quantitative and qualitative methodologies was chosen and data were collected by means of a literature review and a questionnaire, supplemented with open-ended questions. The subjects of the study were second- and third-year B.Ed. students from the northern campus of the University of Namibia.

The results of this study have provided evidence that adult distance education students indeed value the provision of student support services. Specifically, students in this study placed the greatest importance on student support services related to getting started with their studies, for example orientation sessions about available student support services and contact and communication with tutors and fellow students by means of vacation schools, face-to-face tutorials on Saturdays at regional centres and support through study groups.

One of the conclusions of the study was that the institutional policy and the role of management are crucial in the establishment of an effective student support model to facilitate distance learning.

The following recommendations were formulated:

The University's Centre for External Studies (CES) should conduct periodic and regular evaluation studies of its distance education students to design, develop and provide student support services that will be tailored to students' specific needs and expectations.

CES should pay attention to support services that help reduce barriers if it is to attain its mission of making quality higher education more accessible.

CES should provide adequate training to tutors to prepare them for the special challenges presented by open and distance learning.

CES should design and implement an appropriate Information and Communication Technology (ICT) course to empower distance education students adequately for the use of modern ICT.

## OPSOMMING

Beleide ten opsigte van afstandsonderrig en 'n toeganklike en buigsame leerproses het baie daartoe bygedra om toegang tot hoër onderwys wêreldwyd uit te brei. Afstandsonderrig is egter nie net 'n enkele stap verwyderd van die leerproses in die klaskamer nie. Dit is 'n totale paradigmaskuif, en as leerstof buite die klaskamer oor enige afstand gelewer moet word, is tegnologie en tegnieke om studente te ondersteun van groot belang. Teen hierdie agtergrond is gegronde argumente aangevoer dat die verskaffing van studente-ondersteuningsdienste, ooreenkomstig die verskeidenheid van behoeftes en verwagtinge van volwasse afstandsonderrig-studente, 'n integrale deel moet uitmaak van die voorsiening van toeganklike en afstandsonderrig.

Die fokuspunt van hierdie ondersoek was om studente-ondersteuningsdienste, soos verskaf aan die noordelike kampus van die Universiteit van Namibië, vanuit 'n studente-oogpunt te evalueer.

'n Kombinasie van kwantitatiewe en kwalitatiewe metodologieë is gebruik en data is ingesamel deur middel van 'n literatuur-oorsig en 'n vraelys, aangevul met opeantwoord vrae. Tweede- en derdejaar B. Ed. studente van die noordelike kampus van die Universiteit van Namibië was die teikengroep vir hierdie ondersoek.

Die uitslag van die ondersoek het bewys dat volwasse afstandsonderrig-studente inderdaad die verskaffing van studente-ondersteuningsdienste op prys stel. Studente in hierdie ondersoek het die meeste waarde geheg aan dié studente-ondersteuningsdienste wat verband hou met die aanvang van hulle studies, byvoorbeeld oriënteringssessies rakende beskikbare studente-ondersteuningsdienste, en kontak en kommunikasie met dosente en

medestudente deur middel van vakansieskole, persoonlike groepsklasse by streeksentrums op Saterdag en ondersteuning deur studiegroepe.

Een van die gevolgtrekkings van die ondersoek was dat die beleid van die instelling en die rol van die bestuur 'n uiters belangrike rol speel in die daarstelling van 'n doeltreffende studente-ondersteuningsmodel om afstandsonderrig te fasiliteer.

Die volgende aanbevelings is geformuleer:

Dat die Universiteit se Sentrum vir Buitemuurse Studies (CES) periodieke en gereelde ondersoeke onder sy afstandsonderrigstudente van stapel stuur ten einde pasmaak studente-ondersteuningsdienste te ontwerp, te ontwikkel en te voorsien wat aan sy studente se besondere behoeftes en verwagtinge sal voldoen.

Dat CES aandag skenk aan ondersteuningsdienste wat sal help om hindernisse te verminder as hy sy doel om kwaliteit hoër onderwys meer toeganklik te maak, wil verwesenlik.

Dat CES voldoende opleiding aan dosente verskaf ten einde hulle voor te berei vir die besondere uitdagings van toeganklike en afstandsonderrig.

Dat CES 'n toepaslike kursus in inligtings- en kommunikasietegnologie (ICT) ontwikkel en implementeer ten einde afstandsonderrigstudente genoegsaam toe te rus om moderne ICT te kan gebruik.



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## CHAPTER 1

# CONTEXTUALISATION AND ORIENTATION OF THE STUDY

## 1.1 INTRODUCTION

Futurists predict increasing demands for higher education during the new millennium (McHenry and Bozik, 1997). At the same time, resources for such education are being threatened. To address this issue, many learning institutions are looking to distance education as a means of sharing resources and reaching more students. Moriarty (1995:5) predicts, “The prospects are for more...distance learning courses”. The impact of this trend is described by Noon (1996:4) when he states, “Distance learning courses are offering students new flexibility in course and even campus selection, causing many institutions to begin redefining themselves”. Sir John Daniel, former vice-chancellor of the United Kingdom’s Open University (UKOU), contends that a second revolution in education is underway. “Spurred by continuing growth in the demand for education, especially among adults, teaching and training institutions of all types are exploring and adopting the methods of open and distance learning. They are encouraged by the convergence of computers, telecommunications and television, which will turn our homes into environments for learning as rich as our schools, colleges and universities” (Daniel, 1995:xi).

Being a flexible form of adult education, distance education appears as a good means of providing help to adults in many kinds of learning projects within the framework of lifelong learning (Bäåth, 1982). In its essence, distance study is usually individual study. It may or may not be supplemented by a range of student support services which complement the mass-produced materials which

make up the most well-known element in open and distance learning. Tait (1995) notes that the elements of open and distance learning which are commonly referred to as student support are made up of tutoring, whether face-to-face, by correspondence, by telephone or electronically; counselling; the organisation of study centres; interactive teaching through television and radio; and other activities. These activities have as key conceptual components the notion of supporting the individual learning of the student whether alone or in groups, while in contrast the mass-produced elements are identical for all learners (Tait, 1995:232).

## **1.2 BACKGROUND INFORMATION TO THE STUDY**

There can be little doubt that distance education and open and flexible learning policies have done much to extend accessibility to higher education throughout the world. In South Africa specifically, Glennie (1996) provides evidence that the distance education sector is considerable and is becoming a very significant part of higher education provision. She states that approximately one-third of the national teaching corps is involved in distance education programmes. Moreover, South Africa's White Paper on Education has identified distance education as an essential mechanism for achieving its goals (Department of Education, 1995:28). In a similar vein, Möwes and Siaciwena (2000) state that the University of Namibia's (UNAM) first five year development plan (1995-1999) committed the university to continue and expand its distance education services. One of the key objectives in UNAM's first five year development plan was to address some of "the relics of colonial regimes" and it states in this regard that many Namibians from formerly disadvantaged communities, who were already in employment, needed to have their work skills upgraded and sharpened without having to leave their jobs (University of Namibia, 1995). The development plan noted that such people were scattered throughout the country, especially in regions that had previously been designated as "homelands". Therefore, one of UNAM's key goals and responsibilities is to reach out to people and to assist them to continue with their education, through the University's Centre for External Studies.

Consequently, the University's first five year development plan specifies that the principal objective of the Centre for External Studies "is to contribute to the mission of the University, and of the Ministry of Education and Culture, of extending higher education to people outside the walls of the University, and beyond the city of Windhoek" (University of Namibia, 1995:28). The mission of the Centre for External Studies, which is a sub-statement of the mission statement of the University, is therefore to make **quality** higher education accessible to adult members of the community by providing open learning through distance and continuing education programmes.

One important means of measuring and analysing the effectiveness and quality of the learning experience in a distance education system is through the evaluation of the student support system (Dillon, Gunawardena and Parker, 1992). "Support systems contribute to the 'process' of a course as do the learning materials" (Hodgson, 1986:56); and support systems, developed in recognition of student needs, help the distance education student become competent and self-confident in learning, social interactions and self-evaluation (Rae, 1989). Wheeler (1999) substantiates the impact of the provision of student support services and contends that distance learning is not just a move away from learning within the classroom. It is a complete paradigm shift – a change in the fabric and culture of education. When an institution delivers learning materials outside the classroom across any distance, it is important that technologies and techniques support students and improve communications between students and tutors. In addition, Paul (1988) argues that the overwhelming experience of distance educators has been an increasing recognition that part-time adult students, especially those at a distance, require all the personal support they can get if they are to succeed.



### 1.3 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The distance education student's needs for a variety of student support services can be well justified. In the literature on student support, many researchers (Sewart, 1983; Brindley, 1988; Rumble, 1993; Tait, 1995; Mills and Tait, 1996; Paul and Brindley, 1996 and Lamb and Smith, 2000) express the conviction that student support services can personalise and humanise distance education systems. While course-materials writing and development tends to focus more on content, support services tend to focus towards facilitating each student's full development (Brindley, 1988).

The implementation of a student support system at the Centre for External Studies is regarded as crucial in order to facilitate the full development of each student and to ensure success in the learning process of the student. Furthermore, the researcher believes that if the Centre for External Studies is to achieve its mission of making quality higher education accessible to adult members of the community, assessment strategies need to be put in place to find out whether this mission has been achieved, and if not, how to realise it. Such a strategy would be to evaluate the effectiveness of the current student support system from the perspective of the student. No formal evaluation of the provision of student support services at the Centre for External Studies has been done before and emphasis should therefore be placed on measures to determine which student support services have been the most effective and which should be improved.

In addition, in the literature on student support in open and distance learning, description and prescription outweigh empirical enquiry or research. According to Robinson (1995), publications on student support are often in the form of "how to do it" guidance or reports of experience. These can have practical value but may be atheoretical or unsubstantiated or lack validity when transferred to other contexts. She further maintains that research on student support in open and distance learning does not reflect diversity. Its base is relatively narrow: most

published research studies are on formal education, are institutionally based, and usually focus on higher education in the more developed countries. Yet, cultural contexts have considerable implications for the generalisability of the research findings. Models of “good practice” developed in Western institutions are not always appropriate for other countries and cultures as Priyadarshini (1994:462) points out: “While education means spreading awareness and lifting taboos, it does not mean violation of people’s customs and traditions. This must be kept in mind while planning a support system”.

It is for this reason that the researcher carried out a study to evaluate the student support services in open and distance learning at the University of Namibia. It is hoped that this study will help to fill the gap in the limited information available regarding the topic under investigation. Moreover, the study was carried out in the specific context of the Namibian situation, and the results therefore apply and may be used to facilitate distance learning strategies that will support adult students in Namibia in a competent manner.

## **1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The study will be guided by the following critical questions in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the Centre for External Studies’ student support system from the perspective of the student:

1. What is the international trend regarding the provision of student support services for distance education students?
2. What are students’ opinions of the student support services provided at the northern campus of the University of Namibia with regard to:
  - administrative support
  - orientation seminars
  - vacation schools/interactive video-conference tutorials
  - telephone-tutoring
  - face-to-face/Saturday classes
  - tutor-marking

3. Are there some student support services that are more influential and effective and some that should be improved?
4. To what extent do student support services respond to the expectations and needs of students?

## 1.5 GOALS OF THE STUDY

The primary goal of the study is to evaluate the effectiveness of the student support system in open and distance learning at the Centre for External Studies of the University of Namibia. In an attempt to achieve this goal, the following research goals have been formulated:

1. To explain the need and importance of student support services for the facilitation of each student's full development and the provision of quality distance education.
2. To compare different models of student support that are used in higher education institutions offering distance education programmes.
3. To determine the needs of adult distance education students from the Centre for External Studies by means of a questionnaire and open-ended questions.
4. To make recommendations that could help to implement a more effective student support system at the Centre for External Studies.

## 1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Each student as well as each class is unique. Each student brings a different level of preparedness to the class, and the institution must be prepared for each student (Lamb and Smith, 2000). The researcher believes that the provision of student support services is an attempt to be prepared for each student. The need for preparedness through student support was stressed by Sewart in his key-note address to the 16<sup>th</sup> World Conference of the International Council for Distance Education (ICDE) (1992), when he stated:

*The objective of a distance institution... is the production of successful students... Students will not easily achieve*

*success if course materials are of poor quality. Nor will they achieve success if they are not dealt with individually through the student support subsystem.*

It is clear that the purpose of student support is based on the belief that learner-centred support services are essential for meaningful learning at a distance and pivotal to student completion (Kuhn and Williams, 1997). The researcher trusts that this study will be of value to the Centre for External Studies, the University as a whole, as well as providers of open and distance learning both in Namibia, and in developing countries with extensive rural communities. It is hoped that the study will:

- play a role in helping to achieve the mission of the Centre for External Studies specifically and that of the University in general;
- offer guidelines to empower and enable the student support department to address the needs of adult students in the Centre for External Studies;
- contribute to more effective student support services for adult learners at open and distance learning institutions in Namibia. It should be noted in this context that there are four major public open and distance learning institutions with distance education programmes, namely the Namibian College of Open Learning (NAMCOL), the National Institute of Educational Development (NIED), the Polytechnic of Namibia and the University of Namibia (UNAM) (Dodds, 1996c). They have distinctly separate mandates except for the overlap between the Polytechnic and UNAM as regards degree courses. NAMCOL was created as a very conscious government policy decision to create a parastatal to run pre-tertiary (secondary) distance education programmes. It also offers a Certificate in Education for Development, which is a basic qualification for Adult Educators. The distance education programme of NIED came about almost by accident, as a result of

a UNESCO assistance programme, which required distance education structures. NIED offers a Basic Education Teachers' Diploma (BETD); and

- in broader terms, contribute to the effective operation and delivery of student support services at open and distance learning institutions. The proposed model for student support, based on the empirical evidence of this study, should enable open and distance learning institutions to continuously and systematically evaluate and monitor their student support sub-systems to determine best practice associated with the way they operate and to establish rational performance goals.

## 1.7 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The provision of effective student support services is probably one of the most important responsibilities of a distance education institution and certainly one that can have the greatest impact on students – the difference between success and failure. In this vein, Paul and Brindley (1996) maintain that with the evolution of distance education in both theory and practice, institutional research has shifted its focus to understanding individuals better: what and how they learn and how they can be encouraged to develop more independence. As a result, the vision of students as passive and somewhat invisible receivers of knowledge has given way to one of students as being much more actively involved in their learning process. These authors stress that within this dynamic, distance educators have been challenged to reconsider the role and purpose of student support systems. There is growing recognition of the central role of student support services in making distance education more responsive to individual students. It is therefore crucial to examine how student support services fit into the distance education system as a whole, since this will help to clarify the role of student support services.

### **1.7.1 Theoretical and conceptual framework of the study**

There are two commonly used conceptual frameworks which set out to explain how support services fit into the Distance Education System, namely the systems approach and the transactional framework.

#### **1.7.1.1 *Student support services as one of the essential sub-systems of the distance education system***

Von Bertalanffy (1950:143) argues that the generally acknowledged central position of the systems theory is the concept of *wholeness*. System theorists recognise that “the whole is more than the sum of its parts”. He stresses the need to study not only isolated parts and processes of organisms or systems but also to study the operation of the whole and in particular to consider ways in which parts and processes interact. He says: “As a consequence it is not sufficient to study isolated parts and processes since the essential problems are the organising relations that result from dynamic interaction of those parts” (1975:6).

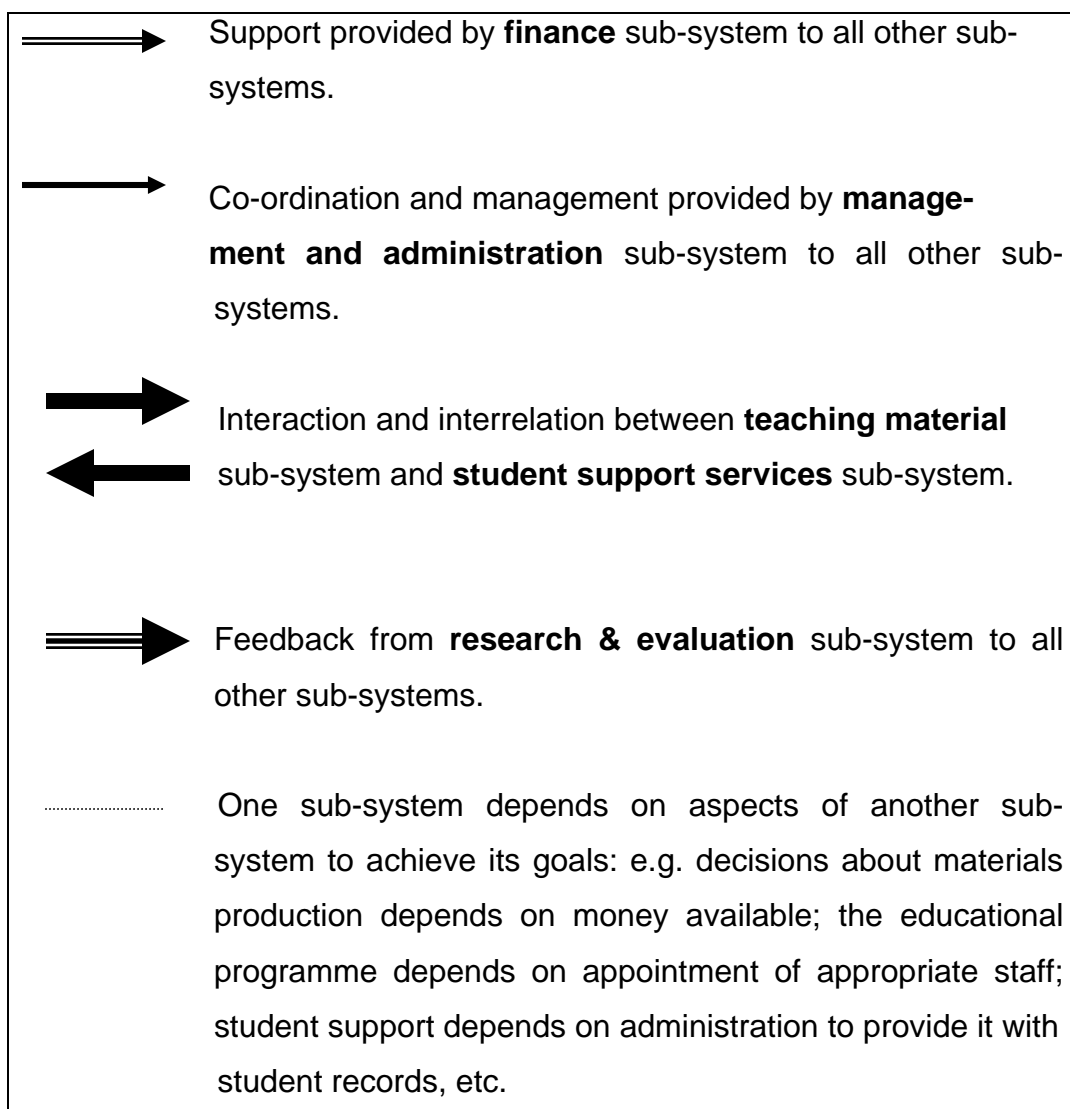
The concept of a system can be defined or conceptualised in many ways. Specifically, Von Bertalanffy (1975:7) suggests that a system can be defined as “complexes of elements standing in interaction”. Bleecher (1983:68) contends that “a system is an organised collection of interrelated elements characterised by a boundary and a functional unity”, while Betts (1992:38) sees a system as “a set of elements that function as a whole to achieve a common purpose”. A common thread emerges from these concepts, namely that interaction, interrelatedness, functional unity and functioning as a whole are key elements of conceptualising a system.

The systems approach sees distance education as a system with a number of sub-systems, of which student support is one, which are all inter-linked and interdependent. As such, this approach looks at how the sub-systems work and fit together into an integrated whole (Kuhn and Bussack, 1997). Furthermore, it emphasises the need to structure a distance education institution systematically

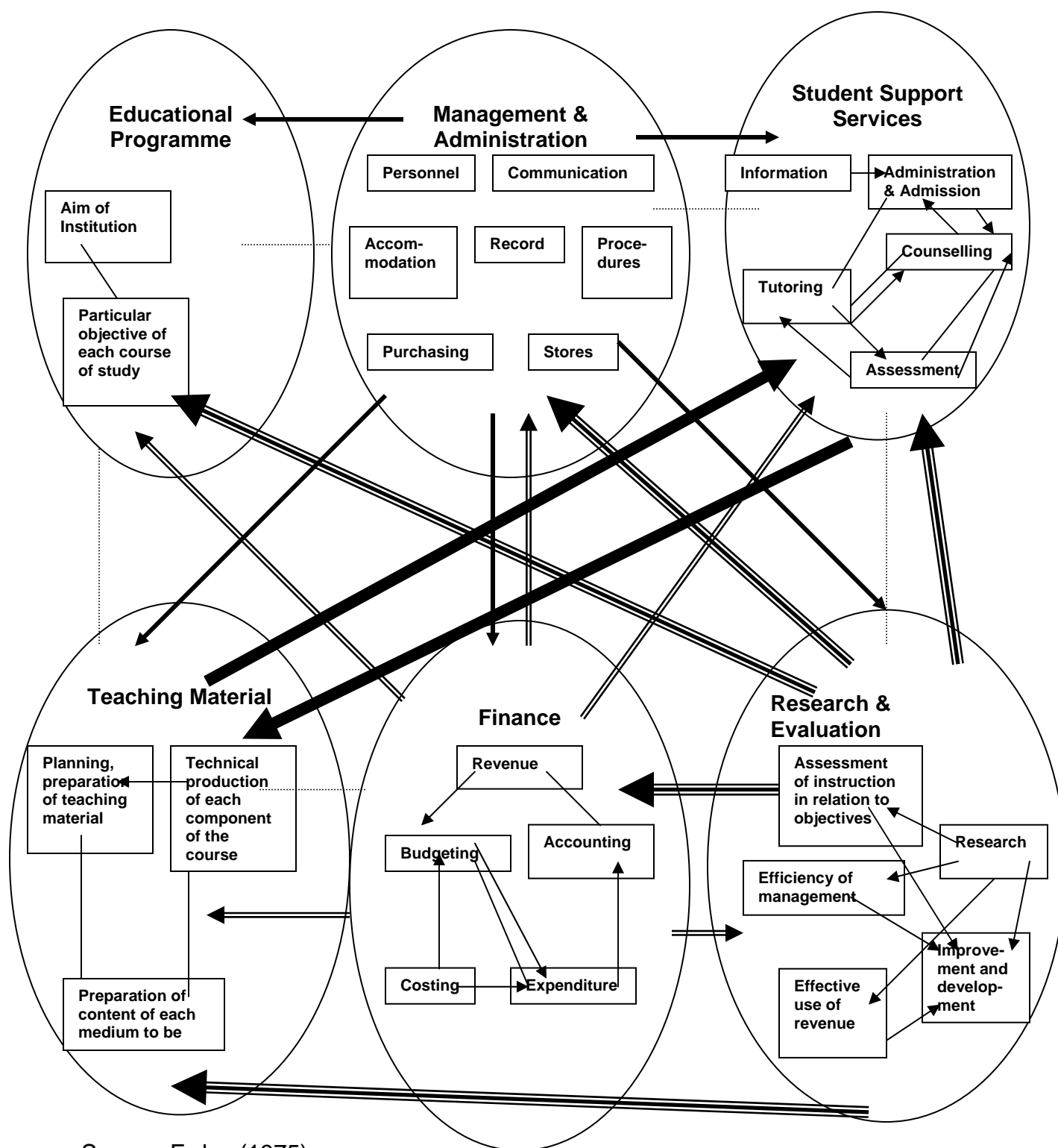
so that it is designed to, and actually does, meet the needs of its distance education students. The person who first tried to describe distance education institutions in this way was Erdos (1975) in her address to the International Conference of the then ICCE (International Council of Correspondence Education), the forerunner of the ICDE. In her paper, she argued that distance education has a recognisable system and identifiable sub-systems.

Figure 1.1 is a diagram of the system of distance education and shows within the total system six interdependent sub-systems. The key to this diagram is provided below.

### KEY



**FIGURE 1.1**  
**DISTANCE EDUCATION SYSTEM AND SUB-SYSTEMS**



Source: Erdos (1975)



To fulfil the aims and objectives of the planned educational programme, teaching materials must be prepared for one or more medium of communication – either printed matter, radio, television, tape recorder or a combination of two or more media. The prepared teaching material should be distributed to those who want it and their reaction channelled back to the educators. Only by the reaction of students can the instruction be assessed in relation to its objectives. These sub-systems of planning the educational programme, the preparation of its teaching material, service to students, and evaluation, all depend on financial resources, and on the administrative organisation and routines of management. Thus, every one of the six sub-systems feeds into, and is dependent upon, each of the others in a tightly interlocked relationship, so that the efficient functioning of the whole system depends on the efficient functioning of each activity within each sub-system (Erdos, 1975). These sub-systems are all important in their own right, but they must work together and they cannot remain static if they are to serve the students.

In addition, there is no doubt that the approach to student support, which an institution might take, is usually shaped by their understanding of the primary functions of student support. Tait (2000:289) proposed these as being threefold:

- *“cognitive: supporting and developing learning through the mediation of the standard and uniform elements of course materials and learning resources for individual students;*
- *affective: providing an environment which supports students, creates commitment, and enhances self-esteem; and*
- *systemic: establishing administrative processes and information management systems which are effective, transparent and overall student-friendly”.*

Tait (2000) further points out that these functions are both essential and interdependent, which supports and must be interpreted within the above theoretical framework and address needs on all system levels. The three core

functions of student support are truly interrelated and interdependent (Tait, 2000) which stresses the need to study not only isolated parts and processes of the student support system, but also to study the operation of the whole and in particular to consider ways in which parts and processes interact. What is of particular concern is to acknowledge that the operation of the three functions should be seen as a whole and to consider how they interact.

Tait (2000:289) justified the interdependence and interrelatedness of the three core functions of student support and argued that:

*student support can primarily be seen as to do with an administrative process (function three), often from the perspective of efficiency. But where this limited view governs, there will be a diminishment in the second function, relating to the extent to which a student feels committed and comfortable with the institution, and dropout may be more likely to occur. Equally, however, in an institution where administrative procedures or information management are ineffective, for example, not being timely, or being obstructive through admitting no leeway or exceptions, then students will be pushed out. What is less often recognised is the cognitive function of student support, where it includes tutoring and assessment services. Where the support of students mediates teaching embodied in courseware, then it clearly relates to learning, and thus to cognitive outcomes. It also and necessarily relates to the objective of providing an environment where students feel at home, where they feel valued, and which they find manageable.*

#### **1.7.1.2 The transactional framework**

Moore's theory of transactional distance, which is the psychological and communications space that separates the teacher and the learner, includes

discussion of “instructional dialogue” and notes that the term *dialogue* has a greater degree of purposefulness, being “valued by each party”, than the broader term interaction (Moore, 1993:23-24). Tait (1996) also quotes Moore (1983:76) whose work established that in relation to structure – that is to say the pre-written learning and assessment materials – central to distance education was a “relationship that was individual and dialogic”.

According to this framework, a series of transactions are made between the different people involved in a distance education programme:

- between learner and course material;
- between learners and tutors;
- between a learner and (an)other learner(s); and
- between learners and their institution.

(Kuhn and Bussack, 1997)

“Transaction”, in this sense, implies that two parties are involved in an action that involves both of them in some form of communication and usually also some form of contract or agreement. Applied to distance education, this means communication between the providing institution through its administrative or academic staff or its course materials, and the students. In addition to communication, there is a contract involved, with responsibilities assumed by both parties. Similarly, Basson and Nonyongo (1997) argue that transactional distance, as a concept, derives from the belief that distance education provision is an interactive participatory experience for both the providing institution and for its students. Based on this belief, the provision of distance education should follow a “student-oriented” or “responsive” approach (Basson and Nonyongo, 1997). This orientation foregrounds interaction between institutional requirements and student needs, stresses dialogical communication, and creates space for students to exercise limited forms of control over learning. This orientation emphasises that organisational arrangements should hold together at any one moment the various sub-systems of its provision so that they function holistically

to serve students. Nonyongo (1993) endorses this view and is of the opinion that materials writing, support for learning, ongoing analysis of needs and the administration of support services as sub-systems of distance education, are seen to be organically connected, to decrease transactional distance and to promote responsiveness between providers and students.

The transactional framework puts the emphasis on the people involved and the agreements between them, rather than on the structures stressed by the system approach. However, these two frameworks are both relative to the understanding and importance of student support services in open and distance learning, since both structure and relationships are important in the provision of effective student support services.

## **1.8 CLARIFICATION OF CONCEPTS AND TERMS**

The concepts and commonly utilised terminology in the field of open and distance learning have been evolving over time in line with developments in the field and the needs of distance education students. It is, however, important to note that the choice of definitions often presents problems – even within single countries. This difficulty, of course, multiplies when terms are used across borders and languages in the international context. In the following section, the concepts and terms relevant to this study are defined.

### **1.8.1 Student support services**

In referring to the elements of student support, Tait (1995:232) had the following to say:

*The elements of open and distance learning which are commonly referred to as student support are made up of: tutoring, whether face-to-face, by correspondence, telephone, or electronically; counselling; the organisation of study centres; interactive teaching through TV and radio, and other activities. These activities have as key conceptual*

*components the notion of supporting the individual learning of the student whether alone or in groups, while in contrast the mass-produced elements are identical for all students. It will be argued that both elements are essential and integral.*

For the purpose of this study, student support services refer to the help distance education students receive in addition to the course materials. Student support can be given in a variety of forms and may be organised support or informal support and may reach the student through different means, such as administrative support, orientation seminars, vacation schools/interactive video-conference tutorials, telephone-tutoring, face-to-face/Saturday classes and tutor-marked assignments.

### **1.8.2 Distance education**

It is not easy to focus on one definition of distance education, because so many definitions have been formulated and each one has served a useful purpose. The researcher concentrated on four of these definitions as they give an indication of the purpose, structure, process and characteristics of distance education.

Holmberg (1977:9) defines distance education in the following way:

*The term 'distance education' covers the various forms of study at all levels which are not under the continuous, immediate supervision of tutors present with their students in lecture rooms or on the same premises, but which, nevertheless, benefit from the planning, guidance and tuition of a tutorial organisation.*

According to Peters (1971:206):

*Distance education is a method of imparting knowledge, skills and attitudes, which is rationalised by the application of division of labour and organisational principles as well as by*

*the extensive use of technical media, especially for the purpose of reproducing high quality teaching material which makes it possible to instruct great numbers of students at the same time wherever they live. It is an industrialised form of teaching and learning.*

In Moore's (1973:664) words:

*Distance education may be defined as the family of instructional methods in which the teaching behaviours are executed apart from the learning behaviours, including those that in a contiguous situation would be performed in the learner's presence, so that communication between the teacher and the learner must be facilitated by print, electronic, mechanical or other devices.*

Willis (2001:1) defines distance education as follows:

*At its most basic level, distance education takes place when a teacher and student(s) are separated by physical distance, and technology (i.e. voice, video, data, and print), often in concert with face-to-face communication, is used to bridge the instructional gap. These types of programmes can provide adults with a second chance at a college education, reach those disadvantaged by limited time, distance or physical disability, and update the knowledge base of workers at their places of employment.*

However, for the purpose of this study, the defining elements of distance education include:

- the separation of tutor and student, which distinguishes it from conventional education;

- the influence of the Centre for External Studies both in the design and development of course materials and in the provision of student support services, which distinguishes it from private/correspondence study;
- the use of technical media – print, audio, video-conference – to unite tutor and student and carry the content of the course;
- the provision of two-way communication in the form of telephone-tutoring, so that the student may benefit from or even initiate dialogue; and
- the absence of the learning group throughout the learning process so that students are usually taught as individuals rather than in groups, with voluntary face-to-face contact with tutors in the form of week-long vacation schools twice a year, weekend tutorials and peer interaction through study groups, for both didactic and socialisation purposes.

### 1.8.3 Open learning

In the English-language literature, distance education is often linked with the concept of *open learning*. The movement for this came from the UK's Open University, which was founded in 1969. There were good reasons for calling this institution "open".

At present it can be seen how the terms *distance education* and *open learning* are starting to fuse. The two terms are already used as synonyms in many parts of the world, although strictly speaking they are distinct but overlapping.

The South African Institute for Distance Education (SAIDE) (1998:7) refers to open learning as:

*an approach to education which seeks to remove all unnecessary barriers to learning, so that as many people as*

*possible are able to take advantage of meaningful learning opportunities throughout their lives.*

Coffey (1977:11) defines an open learning system as:

*one in which the restrictions placed on students are under constant review and removed wherever possible. It incorporates the widest range of teaching strategies, in particular those using independent and individualised learning.*

A rather different and wider definition was given by Lewis and Spencer (1986:9):

*‘Open Learning’ is a term used to describe courses flexibly designed to meet individual requirements. It is often applied to provision which tries to remove barriers that prevent attendances at more traditional courses, but it also suggests a learner-centred philosophy. Open learning courses may be offered in a learning centre of some kind or most of the activity may be carried out away from such a centre (e.g. at home). In nearly every case, specially prepared or adapted materials are necessary.*

Open learning at the University of Namibia’s Centre for External Studies can be described as an attempt to break down the traditional barriers to training in order to offer students the opportunity to be accredited and recognised for previous learning experiences through a mature age entry test; opening up opportunities for access to the training they need; and enabling students to learn at the time, place and pace which satisfies their circumstances and requirements.



## 1.9 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The research design incorporates both a quantitative and a qualitative dimension, as this was the most appropriate way to achieve the purpose of the study.

### 1.9.1 Quantitative paradigm

The researcher used a quantitative approach and focused on the causal-comparative method, which is also referred to as ex post facto research (Gall, Borg and Gall, 1996), because causes are studied after they presumably have exerted their effect on another variable. The ex post facto method is a type of quantitative research that seeks to discover possible causes and effects of a behaviour pattern or personal characteristics by comparing individuals in whom it is present with individuals in whom it is absent or present to a lesser degree. Studying the causes of effective learning is cited as an example for which the ex post facto method can be used (Gall et al., 1996:380). They further maintain that the main reason for using the ex post facto method is that many of the cause-and-effect relationships in education that we wish to study are not amenable to experimental manipulation.

Cohen and Manion (1994) cite Kerlinger (1986), who defined ex post facto research more formally as that in which the independent variable has already occurred and in which the researcher starts with the observation of a dependent variable. The researcher then studies the independent variable in retrospect for its possible relationship to, and effect on, the dependent variable.

The researcher has identified this method as appropriate for the study, since the independent variable (student support services) cannot be directly manipulated by the investigator, because their manifestations have already happened. This particular research design is also chosen because this study sought to establish the existence of certain relationships and effects among variables under

investigation, that is, student support services and expectations and needs of distance education students.

In this study, students' expectations and needs with regard to provision of student support services were used to evaluate student support services. It is therefore assumed that the students' expectations and needs have already been developed and student support services also already exist, hence, ex post facto design is most appropriate for the study.

### **1.9.2 Qualitative paradigm**

The reality to be studied, namely which student support services have been the most effective and which should be improved, should include students' subjective experiences. This is a characteristic of the interpretive paradigm, which aims to explain the subjective reasons and meanings that lie behind the student's interaction with various student support services. The basic assumptions guiding the interpretive paradigm are that knowledge is socially constructed by people active in the research process, and that researchers should attempt to understand the "complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it" (Mertens, 1998:11). Consequently, by adopting this assumption of the interpretive paradigm, the researcher looked beyond quantitative information that makes the evidence believable.

### **1.9.3 Methods of data collection**

The research design incorporates both a quantitative (positivist paradigm) and a qualitative (interpretive paradigm) dimension.

Relevant data was collected through a structured questionnaire (see Appendix B) made up of scaled, checklist, and "yes" and "no" questions.

Qualitative data were collected through 11 open-ended questions (see Appendix B, Section D). These open-ended questions were used to obtain data

supplementary to that obtained by items from the questionnaire. In addition, the open-ended questions were administered to establish whether students' expectations and needs had been met and whether they were satisfied with the provision of student support services.

#### **1.9.4 Sampling and population**

The target population was made up of adult distance education students from the East and West educational regions in which the northern campus of the University of Namibia is situated. Furthermore, these students were enrolled for a Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) degree through the Centre for External Studies at the University of Namibia. Both second- and third-year students were included in the study.

In chapter four the researcher gives a detailed description of the methodology followed to complete this study.

### **1.10 ORGANISATION OF THE STUDY**

The study has been organised in the following way:

**Chapter 1:** The first chapter outlines the problem and research questions. This is followed by a discussion on the goals and significance of the study, theoretical framework and relevant concepts and terms for the study.

**Chapter 2 and 3:** These two chapters provide a review of the relevant literature to the problem under discussion. The chapters help to put the problem in its proper perspective and highlight the types of questions being addressed. It also maps out the current international trends in the provision of student support services in open and distance learning.

**Chapter 4:** This chapter is a detailed description of the research design and methodology relevant to this study.

**Chapter 5:** This chapter is based on the research results.

**Chapter 6:** This chapter includes a detailed discussion of the findings and possible implications thereof for the improvement of student support services to meet adult distance education students' expectations and needs.

**Chapter 7:** The final chapter includes a conclusion of the main research results. Additionally, it includes recommendations to improve the provision of student support services at the Centre for External Studies.

## **1.11 SUMMARY**

The first part of this chapter explained the increasing demands for higher education at a time of limited resources and indicated how methods of open and distance learning are regarded as a means of sharing resources and reaching more students.

This was followed by a discussion to illustrate that distance education and open and flexible policies have done much to extend accessibility to higher education with specific reference to South Africa and Namibia. Emphasis was shifted to the importance of supplementing distance education learning materials with effective student support services to ensure quality higher education through open and distance learning methods.

When considering the specific statement of the problem, this chapter listed four questions to address the evaluation of student support services from the perspective of the adult distance education student.

A theoretical framework for this study, which is also part of this chapter, was based on two commonly used conceptual frameworks which set out to explain how student support services fit into a distance education system.

Included in this chapter is a section that clarifies important concepts and terms that will recur throughout the study.

The chapter concludes with an outline of the organisation of the study.

## CHAPTER 2

# THE NEED FOR STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES IN OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING

## 2.1 INTRODUCTION

Openness and accessibility, the hallmarks of many open and distance learning institutions, all too often seem to be associated with significantly lower rates of successful completion of courses and programmes of study than conventional institutions. Fraser and Van Staden (1996) state that levels of dropout and withdrawal from distance education programmes at the tertiary level tend to be higher than for comparable residential courses and are a matter of concern to providing institutions. Tait and Mills (2002) substantiate this concern and report that the decline of 5% in student retention over the last five years has led to the review of student support in the United Kingdom's Open University (UKOU). Tait and Mills (2002) reported that according to the UKOU Retention Project Report, 95 000 out of 166 000 registered students completed and passed their courses in the teaching year 1997/8. The UKOU has a unique mission statement – open as to people, open as to places, open as to methods, and open as to ideas – an “open access” policy that attracts students from a variety of backgrounds, all seeking a divergent range of study goals. With this mission in mind, the UKOU regard it as vital to secure the best possible chances for its students' success. However, the above report reflects a non-completion and failure rate of 43%, which has negative implications for the access mission of the UKOU, hence the establishment by this university of a significant action research project at strategic level tasked with the identification of a range of retention-supportive activities.

The above account clearly reflects that participation and persistence in education and those factors that contribute to their occurrence continue to interest practitioners and researchers alike. As Powell, Conway and Ross (1990:5) so aptly note: “The question of why some students successfully study through distance education and others do not is becoming increasingly important as distance education moves from a marginal to an integral role in the overall educational provision.”

Furthermore, with emerging arguments that demands for higher education are increasing, while educational resources are scarce, open and distance learning has the potential to address some of society’s current problems and to contribute to the enhancement of human development (Wong, 1992), it is necessary to learn more about how this mode of education can be made more accessible to more people (Dhanarajan, 1998). In particular, it is important to understand what contributes to student success in open and distance learning, particularly for those students who are failing to do well in their existing circumstances. A considerable body of previous research has given some insights about factors that can contribute to the success or failure of students, specifically in open and distance learning (Brindley and Jean-Louis, 1990; McAlister, 1998; Nonyongo, 2002 and Peters, 1992). For example, Nonyongo (2002:128) identified major weaknesses in the University of South Africa (UNISA) system which include:

- *low success in terms of completion and throughput rates;*
- *the correspondence nature of programmes in comparison with well-functioning distance education; and*
- *inadequate student support which is exacerbated by the lack of a co-ordinated regional network of learning centres.*

Success in open and distance learning is a complex matter. Isolating specific variables that will guarantee student success may not be possible, but developing an educational environment that will contribute to student success is possible. In this context, Tait (2003:2) argues that:

*While it is very difficult to isolate the variables in an educational system and identify a simple causal relationship of student support with student success, the UNISA example provides the clearest case for the importance of student support in a distance education institution. For many students, especially from the majority population who were excluded from the best universities in South Africa, the opportunity offered by distance education was not a real one. UNISA provides us with the best-documented case hitherto of the dangers of developing distance education without adequate student support.*

The complexity of this situation is further described by Miller (1990), who notes that distance education must be serious about its social role as well as about the integration of delivery mechanisms with the content and the student. It is through the provision of high quality instructional and institutional support services, and through institutional understanding of the characteristics of the adult distance education student, that students will be supported to experience success in the educational environment and attain goals toward which they are striving. In this respect, Tallman (1994) argues for the expansion of Holmberg's (1989) guided didactic conversation model, to include institutional support services in addition to instructional support services. Holmberg (1986) contends that if a distance education course consistently represents a communication process felt to have the character of a conversation, then the students will be more motivated and more successful than if the course studied has an impersonal textbook character. He further notes that this also concerns the use of assignments for submission. If used as a means to stimulate and facilitate conversation-type communication, they are assumed to contribute considerably more to motivation and success than if used as a means to examine and evaluate students (Holmberg, 1986:12). Holmberg (1986) developed this thinking into a formal theory which generated the following hypothesis:

- *the stronger the characteristics of guided didactic conversation, the stronger the students' feelings of*



*personal relationship between them and the supporting organisation;*

- *the stronger the students' feelings that the supporting organisation is interested in making the study matter personally relevant to them, the greater their personal involvement; and*
- *the stronger the students' feelings of personal relations to the supporting organisation and of being personally involved with the study matter, the stronger the motivation and the more effective the learning.*

(Holmberg, 1986:13)

In an attempt to shed some further light on the factors that can affect adult students' success in open and distance learning, the following sections will present a closer examination of recent literature with particular reference to the provision of student support services as an integral part of the delivery of open and distance learning programmes.

## **2.2 THE NEED FOR STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES**

Distance education has rightly been recognised and acclaimed for its ability to “open doors” for large numbers of people who have no other access to further education and training. The question however, is: Does this access lead to success for the majority who enter the open doors?

Studies internationally (Dodds, Lawrence and Guiton, 1984; Dillon, Gunawardena and Parker, 1992 and Shin and Kim, 1999) indicate that withdrawal from distance education has many different causes. Research (Rae, 1989) has found that students with higher previous educational qualifications tend to perform better than those with poorer qualifications. Those who find it difficult to reconcile the conflicting demands of their jobs, family and studies tend to do less well, as do those who find it difficult to direct their own learning (Kuhn and Williams, 1997).

According to Candy (1991), adults are powerfully affected by aspects of their backgrounds – including family and prior education – in ways that limit and constrain their ability to be self-directing in certain learning situations. He is of the opinion that even though it has been argued that the ability to master the basic “codes” of a task or subject is dependent in part on the student’s existing intellectual capabilities, in part on past education, and in part on his/her intentions and purposes, the combination may vary from situation to situation, and therefore a student’s autonomy is also likely to vary from one context to another. Consequently, educators must avoid the assumption that simply because a person has successfully learned something in the past, either in an instructional setting or outside it, he/she will be able to succeed in a new area. Orientation, support and guidance may all be required in the first stages of a learning project.

Paul (1988) introduces a strong note of realism when he argues that the notion advanced by earlier adult educators of the self-directed independent adult learner is largely a myth to anyone who has had the experience of working closely with students in a distance education environment. Brookfield (1988) agrees that it is a myth and sees methodological contradictions arising from the fact that most studies of self-directed learners have used subjects from middle-class, educationally advantaged backgrounds. He states that it is simply not possible to generalise from these studies. As such, Candy (1987) points to the wealth of literature (Chene, 1983; Mezirow, 1981 and Mezirow, 1985), which suggests that many adults feel far from self-directed. He further argues that there is little or no evidence that self-directed approaches compensate for differences. He is of the opinion that such an approach may accentuate disadvantage if allowed. Self-direction benefits those students who are able to deal with it, while placing those who are less confident at a relative disadvantage. In addition, Candy stresses that research has failed to demonstrate that any enjoyment derived from being allowed control over learning, has increased enthusiasm for the subject matter itself, or that it has improved achievement. Also, for students who have had unhappy experiences of learner-controlled instruction, motivation could actually be

decreased by learner control, leading to feelings of frustration, inability and eventually failure.

Similarly, Burge (1988:19) concludes that:

*We need not so much an andragogical system which encourages and reinforces self-directed learning, but a neo-andragogical approach – one that recognises the realities of adulthood, not the myths. We need not so much self-directed learning as much as self-responsibility for learning. We need not so much to admire the independence of students, as we need to facilitate the interdependence of students and the collaboration of educators.*

In addition, Candy (1991) argues that although it is possible for a person to become autonomous, and that such an attainment may be a central part of being an adult, it cannot be assumed to be a unidimensional and once-and-for-all attainment. He explains that often a person will exhibit qualities of intellectual but not moral or emotional autonomy (or vice versa). Also, it is not uncommon to find a person who behaves very autonomously in some aspect of his/her life (for instance at work), but seems very dependent when it comes to other aspects (for instance in a learning situation). Neither is it a single once-and-for-all attainment, but rather a constantly renewed and situationally variable attribute. Candy (1991) is of the opinion that no one ever becomes fully self-directed in any final sense, but in certain circumstances, or at certain times, people may behave more autonomously than at others.

It is the opinion of the researcher that those of us who work in distance education institutions in Southern Africa can identify strongly with the arguments of the above-mentioned authors. Specifically, the adult distance education students in this context need particular forms of support, since they are a socially and educationally disadvantaged majority. Nonyongo (1993) notes that students who completed their studies were adamant that without the support services provided, they would not have succeeded in the face of

the various pressures in their lives. According to her, the particular needs of distance education students from educationally and socially disadvantaged communities in Southern Africa include:

- the need to develop and maintain self-confidence in the face of an unfamiliar learning process;
- the need to understand the vocabulary as well as the discourse of a particular subject/course;
- the need to unlearn rote learning as a way of “learning” and to learn to become autonomous students;
- the need to develop time management skills, in view of long working hours, or long hours spent travelling, and multiple responsibilities;
- the need to have access to tutors and tutorials; and
- the need to study together with other students in order to engage in “conversation” and develop a “community” of fellow students (Tait, 1996:59-60) which affirm what is culturally the case among many African students in Southern Africa.

From the literature (Sewart, 1983; Bääth, 1982; Dodds, Lawrence and Guiton, 1984; Brindley, 1988; Paul, 1988; Fritsch and Ströhlein, 1989; Rae, 1989; Dillon, Gunawardena and Parker, 1992; Nonyongo, 1993; Nonyongo and Ngegebule, 1993; Rumble, 1993; Sweet, 1994; Tait, 1995; Boonzaaier, 1996; Basson and Nonyongo, 1997; Shin and Kim, 1999; Lamb and Smith, 2000 and Tait, 2000) on student support in open and distance learning, it was concluded that:

- student-institution contact, such as regular contact with support staff, appears to have a positive effect on student performance and persistence rates;
- factors which correlate positively with course completion rates include the use of course assignments, early submission of the first assignment, short turn-around time for giving students feedback, pacing progress, supplementary audio-tapes or

telephone tutorials, favourable working conditions in the student's context, the quality of learning materials and reminders from tutors to complete work;

- students value contact with support staff and their peers, though they do not always use the services provided; students most often report a preference for face-to-face tutoring compared to other media, though where face-to-face tutorials are not possible, other forms of contact are rated valuable; and
- personal circumstances and lack of time are the most common reasons given for poor academic performance.

It is therefore evident that the profile and needs of distance education students justify the provision of individualised support if they are to complete their studies and develop into critical learners with appropriate competencies.

Lawton (1997) cites Earwaker (1992) who argues for the need of student support to become a mainstream part of higher education. He writes: "The aim in providing support is not simply to enable students to survive, but to ensure that they derive maximum benefit from their course" (Earwaker, 1992:11). In this context, although Earwaker is writing about traditional higher education courses, this focus on the educational process is equally relevant in open and distance learning. Reid (1995) endorses this view and states that there is ample evidence to confirm what students want and a high degree of commonality, whatever the institution and whatever the country.

There is common agreement between both student and institutional perspectives that there is a need for a place for student-student and student-teacher interaction, for access to library and other resources, and a place for the introduction and test-running of new technology applications, particularly telecommunications (Harrison, 1991c; Kember and Dekkers, 1987; Livingston, 1994). Student support therefore, is not an "add on" but "an all pervasive component of educational processes which ensures that learning and teaching are approached from a learner-centered vision of education" (Nunan,

1993:1). Moreover, in his recent address at the third Pan Commonwealth Conference in Dunedin, the president of the Commonwealth of Open Learning, Sir John Daniel noted that:

*Learners are the best ones to judge best practice. Learner-centeredness should be a focal point regarding best practice and a 'culture of care' should be part of best practice in open and distance learning.*

(Daniel, 2004:5)

Consequently, student support *is* as important as teaching; it *is* teaching; it *is* central to all we do as professionals.

Debate within an institution about who its students are, or will be, provides the platform on which to analyse what they need in terms of student support services (Tait, 1995). Sewart (1992), is of the opinion that providers of distance education should take into consideration the expressed needs of their students in whatever support they offer.

The majority of adult students have a range of activities, commitments and responsibilities which impinge on their learning. Many have to cope with a full-time job. They have to divide time among their various roles. Studying is just one part of the many parts which they have to balance in their daily lives. While this may be typical of any adult student, the situation in the distance education context is different. Several researchers (Brindley, 1988; Colquhoun, 1996; Evans, 1994; Grace, 1994; Hipp, 1997; Imaroto, 1988; Mills and Tait, 1996; Paul, 1988; Phillips, 1993; Sims, 1997; Stokken, 1996; Von Prümmer, 1994; Von Prümmer and Rossil, 1988; Woodley, Wagner, Slowey and Fulton, 1987) have argued that distance education students normally experience role conflict because they are studying and living at home. They have to set aside time for study. Consequently, distance education students, with their diverse experiences, personal circumstances, and learning preferences, need a corresponding diversity of support from providers. Providers of open and distance learning presently offer various levels of support and King (1988:1) contends that these support mechanisms

demonstrate “commitments to ease of student access to courses, academic advice, assistance with administrative matters and, in some instances, counselling of a personal kind”. King (1988:1) further argues that there is “...recognition, common to modern distance education, that students need support through some regular human contact in their studies...It is no longer generally assumed that students will be sufficiently motivated to complete courses, whatever problems they incur, simply by virtue of their enrolment”.

The unique situation of distance education students increases the importance of student support provision. Student support services are provided to meet the needs of distance education students and to prevent problems that lead to dropout or failure (Crockett, 1985). Student support services can make a positive difference to completion rates and have been found to be effective in retaining distance education students (Brindley and Jean-Louis, 1990), who might otherwise drop out because of factors such as poor study habits, inadequate time management techniques, or unrealistic expectations. According to Brindley and Jean-Louis (1990), students often enter the institution with no recent educational experience and very little idea of the special demands of self-study. Consequently, the overwhelming experience of distance educators has been an increasing recognition that adult students, especially those at a distance, require all the personal support they can get if they are to succeed. While it is critical that such students have the support of family and friends in their academic endeavours, the institution has important responsibilities to provide its own forms of support. An objective scrutiny of the following challenges unique to the open and distance learning mode of delivery, which must be overcome, suggests that student support services should be in the ascendancy at all distance education institutions.

### **2.2.1 Isolation of the student**

The adult distance education student is typically isolated geographically from the institution and from contact with peers. For example, on a traditional campus, upon leaving a difficult lecture, a student receives immediate support from peers who also found it confusing, whereas the isolated distance

education student gets little such reinforcement and is apt to think that he/she is just not “smart” enough to understand a passage (which may be merely badly written or poorly designed).

This sort of isolation tends to exaggerate the poor self-concept of those who are uncertain of themselves. Without scheduled classes, the student may not be able to get the support services just when he/she requires them. A frequent problem which occurs with telephone-tutoring for example, is that a tutor is not readily available just when a student is ready to deal with him/her; conversely, the tutor may contact the student when he/she is preoccupied with personal or family concerns.

Another basic problem identified by Cross (1981) as critical for the adult distance education student, is basic information – simply knowing what the rules are and what services are available. Even when an institution has a wide range of support services for students, many may not avail themselves of them because they are unaware of their existence.

In addition, “informal” learning of the sort which takes place in common rooms, cafeterias and residences is less readily available in open and distance learning, especially if the student does not attend study sessions or have a supportive network of family and friends.

Clearly, studying through open and distance learning is often a very isolating experience – students are isolated from other students, their tutors, the institution and sometimes their own family and friends. Such isolation must inhibit if not prevent entirely any possibility of dialogue in their studies. Yet, education – at least as perceived in traditional thought – is essentially a process of dialogue. Simpson (2000) argues that if students are not offered the opportunity for dialogue, any kind of education will fail. Moreover, it is not possible in open and distance learning to offer dialogue through course materials only. Overcoming isolation through dialogue can only realistically take place through the process of student support. Chadibe (2002:9) offers



the following account on how participation in self-directed study groups enabled UNISA students to make better use of distance education courses and to overcome the barrier of isolation experienced by many distance education students:

*...study groups are set up, usually by students themselves, in conjunction with tutorials, so that tutorials enable study groups and also keep them on track... The reasons respondents gave for participating in a study group are themselves examples of the development of “learner autonomy” among them: “...a study group gives one more insight and enables you to participate. What you have discussed in a group once, you will never forget. If you agree to come to the group knowing something about the chapter you agreed to prepare for that meeting you are forced to do so. It is usually unacceptable if you keep coming up with apologies caused by lack of prior preparations. It benefits us, as we know that each one of us has to prepare beforehand. It also encourages us to study hard. We build confidence in each other; even introverts become extroverts because each one is given a chance to say something. Each one chooses the chapter she wishes to prepare for the next study group meeting; especially a chapter she wants to understand better”.*

### **2.2.2 Reification of knowledge**

Distance education is supposedly non-traditional and innovative, and yet there is a considerable case for suggesting that it can be extremely conservative. It may perpetuate the worst of traditional rote learning, encouraging students to repeat what has been presented rather than really thinking the materials through.

Another disadvantage of the printed self-study package is that it cannot so easily be adapted to the needs of a particular student or to accommodate new

knowledge, whereas the volume of face-to-face course content is frequently cut back during the year by a professor who has underestimated the time or found that his/her students cannot cope with the volume and pace. This almost never happens in the distance education setting where the course is the same for every student. One of the most frequent student complaints, despite the best efforts of instructional designers, is that distance education courses are too long and that one has to work twice as hard as required at a traditional university to achieve the same credits. One way of combating this would be to give more powers to course tutors to modify courses.

The need for student support also arises because of certain characteristic features of open and distance learning materials. The learning package consists of self-instructional materials with which students joining the system for the first time may not be quite familiar.

Some of the students may find it difficult to handle the self-instructional materials with their various access devices, activities and assignments. These would require knowledge of study skills, which can be provided through student support services.

Paul (1988) argues that whatever the merits of the self-instructional materials – be it that they try to build the teacher in the text, or that they try to simulate a classroom situation – they remain finite in their character. On the other hand, student needs are “infinite” in their variety, since all human beings are. Open and distance learning has to cater for these infinite variations, which the self-instructional materials, however good, may not completely succeed in doing. To satisfy these variations, it thus becomes necessary to offer some additional support. This is precisely where the role of student support services becomes important in open and distance learning.

### **2.2.3 Personal considerations**

The literature on dropout and course completion rates in universities, adult education centres and distance education institutions overwhelmingly

identifies personal rather than institutional factors as being the critical ones in determining a student's success or failure (Bean and Metzner, 1985; Dodds, Lawrence and Guiton, 1984 and Eisenberg and Dowsett, 1990). Contrastingly, Brent and Bugbee (1993), Brindley (1987), Carmichael (1995), Dillon, Gunawardena and Parker (1992) and Peters (1992) are of the opinion that institutional support plays a critical role in the adult distance education student's educational process. Brindley's (1987) findings have challenged the notion that the institution cannot do much to make a difference in students' performance. In particular, she found that while changes in personal circumstances and/or time available were critical incidents most frequently reported by distance education students, course completers reported these almost as frequently as non-completers (1987:84). Clearly, both completers and non-completers faced similar difficulties in trying to learn at a distance, but the major difference appeared to be in the ways with which the two groups coped with them. This contributes to the notion that students can be taught coping skills and strategies and hence it reinforces the need for student support services.

#### **2.2.4 Gap between student expectations and realities**

Conway and Powell (1986) described the "non-starter" as a phenomenon that has received particular attention in open and distance learning - a student who enrolls in a course, does not withdraw within the formalised "withdrawal" period but never completes an assignment, quiz or otherwise participates in the course. While many rationales have been suggested for this non-start problem, including poorly designed first units and unreasonably demanding courses (Conway and Powell, 1986) attention has focused more on the gap between students' expectations for self-study and what they actually face when the course package arrives. In this respect, Woodley and Parlett (1983) include concerns such as ensuring that students have a well-informed sense of the demands on basic skills like time management and study habits, the need for better academic advising and programme planning and a number of other services typically provided by student support services.

### 2.2.5 Student identity

Another, often overlooked factor is the relatively small number of students for whom their identity as “student” is first priority. The adult distance education learners’ “student” identity may be relatively minor, compared to their roles as workers, parents or homemakers. This contrasts with the full-time undergraduates out of secondary school for whom “university student” is almost their exclusive label for the duration of their stay on campus. This is not to suggest that the adult distance education student is less important in any way but simply to note differences in the relative priorities attached to formal learning by these two categories of students. To this effect, Purnell, Cuskelly and Danaher (1996) cite Jegede and Kirkwood (1994) who found that many distance education students are of mature age, have demanding family and work commitments, and have often had a long break since their last formal study. Consequently, the students face a variety of sources of anxiety as they juggle demands from various areas (such as study, work and family), financial costs and the requirements of the study materials themselves. Jegede and Kirkwood (1994: 279) note that “learning within the distance education context may be a daunting prospect for many students” and that student performance may be directly related to the anxiety engendered. This indicates that adult distance education students need support services that contribute to:

- *maintaining or increasing student motivation;*
- *promoting effective study skills;*
- *generating a feeling of ‘belonging’ to the providing institution through, for example, contact with tutors and peers for both social and academic purposes;*
- *providing guidance through the study materials;*
- *providing access to resources; and*
- *providing answers to administrative queries.*

(Brent and Bugbee, 1993; Carmichael, 1995; Dillon, Gunawardena and Parker, 1992; Peters, 1992; Ramaiah and Srinivasacharyulu, 1991)

### **2.2.6 Understanding the institution**

While open and distance learning institutions are dedicated to overcoming barriers which have previously prevented students from gaining access to formal education, they also create barriers of their own. In particular, students may find the modes of operation, from initial registration and course selection through the various non-traditional delivery options, strange and confusing. Paul (1988) is of the opinion that student support services can play a critical role in assisting students to overcome these, through effective information, orientation and advising roles through a host of programmes offered in regional centres, telephonically, regional seminars, by correspondence and through the application of newer, more interactive communication technology. A student's first contact with the institution is a critical one and it will usually be with a regional office, student support department or a tutor. The quality of service rendered will play a critical role in that student's subsequent success in pursuing a distance education course.

In view of the fact that open and distance learning is different from correspondence and conventional study, Calder and McCallum (1998) suggest that systematic efforts need to be made to orient the new entrants into the system. Also, distance education students are mostly adult students and the effectiveness of adult learning varies with learning ability, but is also affected by the approach the adult takes to the learning activity. Undoubtedly, an adult's approach to a learning activity reflects previous experience, including the extent and type of formal education, recent use of learning procedures and current circumstances that give rise to the need for increased competence.

However, if students are inducted or oriented into the open and distance learning system, they are bound to respond better, understand the system, and thereby perform better. Orientation into the system is therefore essential as it prepares the student for his/her academic socialisation with distance learning methods and contributes to his/her understanding of the institution.

### **2.2.7 Moral reasons for student support**

This aspect may seem a little strange, but Simpson (2000) is of the opinion that there is a moral aspect to open and distance learning as there is in any educational activity. If one justification for the provision of student support is to help students progress in their studies, there is a higher moral imperative that sometimes conflicts with that – assisting students to do what is right for them in whatever situation they are currently experiencing.

Clearly, there are situations where a student support adviser or tutor will have conflicting demands. Typically, there will be students who are experiencing difficulties – illness, divorce or bereavement – or who are simply struggling with the intellectual demands of a course. There is a fine line between encouraging and supporting such students to continue at whatever personal costs and allowing them to withdraw, perhaps prematurely, to become dropout statistics, and leaving them with a sense of failure. Simpson (2000) contends that this line can only be drawn if sophisticated and clearly thought out student support policies and procedures are in place.

### **2.2.8 Combating geographic isolation**

An effective student support department can complement the use of innovative delivery modes and communication technologies in combating the geographic isolation faced by so many distance education students. Regional centres, travelling tutors and counsellors, regional residential schools and self-help orientation and learning materials are critical support services in addition to the basic self-study package provided by distance education institutions.

### **2.2.9 Financial aid**

While open and distance learning in itself helps students to afford their tertiary studies by allowing them to study while working or bringing up a family, student support services can assist students further through the provision of financial aid services.

### **2.2.10 Student advocacy role**

Distance education students are usually isolated from each other and they are more remote from the institution than in conventional institutions. Consequently, it may be easier for conflict and misunderstandings to arise between them and the institution. It happens that they have very little power to influence decision-making or to plead a particular case in a distance education institution. Paul (1988) suggests that it is vital that the student support department provide a strong student advocacy service in assisting students to organise their own associations and in taking up student cases, both individual and collective. This role also involves flexibility on occasion to serve the needs of a particularly disadvantaged individual student.

An objective scrutiny of the above challenges and special characteristics of the open and distance learning system should result in institutions that become less able to rely on what Simpson (2000) refers to as “educational Passchendaelism” – throwing new students at courses in the hope that some will get through – and will need to develop more sophisticated ways of increasing retention.

Some improvements will be made possible by redesigning course materials but much more will have to be achieved through enhancing and developing student support services. As outlined in the introduction to this chapter, one characteristic of open and distance learning is its association with high dropout rates (at least in comparison with conventional institutions). As a result, there are implications for institutions as governments throughout the world take an increasingly instrumental view of education and start to link funding to outcomes or success and not to access. The rationale for the establishment of many open and distance learning institutions is to become more accessible to educationally disadvantaged students. Since such students are more likely to drop out there is danger that widening access offers such students not an open door but a revolving door that sweeps them out of the institution as fast as they enter. Widening access will therefore imply a consequent enhancement and focusing of support for such students. In addition, as open and distance learning provision grows, so competition

mounts. As such, Tait and Mills (2002) note that the majority of higher education institutions now in existence offer some part-time study and many also offer some opportunity for distance study. Tait and Mills (2002) elaborate that some universities have as many as 50% of their student body as “mature” students. The multi-mode university is evident, where students can move between full-time and part-time, and campus- and distance-based modes, in a relatively seamless way according to their life situation over a number of years. This offers a very serious challenge and where students have a choice, they will judge institutions by both the quality of the materials they produce and – probably even more – by the standards of student support they offer.

From the above discussion it becomes apparent that the implementation of a student support model should incorporate and aim to meet the unique challenges and needs of distance education students at various stages of their studies. The researcher is of the opinion that the development and implementation of such a student support model calls for and stresses the responsibility of the University of Namibia’s Centre for External Studies to determine and address its distance education students’ needs and expectations. This model of support services should represent and integrate these needs and expectations.

Bearing all of this in mind, it is essential to explain what support services are and what types of support services are provided to distance education students through various stages of their studies.

### **2.3 THE PROVISION OF STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES IN OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING**

In open and distance learning, student support services are instrumental in making two-way educational communication possible. According to Tait (1995), student support means the range of activities that complement the mass-produced materials which make up the most well-known element in distance learning. These activities have the key conceptual component of



supporting the individual learning of the student, whether alone or in groups, while in contrast the mass-produced study materials are identical for all students.

### **2.3.1 What are support services?**

A range of services are provided through activities such as:

- advice/counselling;
- induction/orientation sessions;
- tutoring individually and in groups;
- the learning of study skills, including examination skills;
- peer group support;
- feedback concerning assessment and progress;
- language support;
- career guidance; and
- administrative problem solving.

(Tait, 1995)

According to Keegan (1989), it is the provision of student support services that distinguishes distance education from private/correspondence study and teach-yourself programmes. It is in recognition of the challenges and needs unique to distance education students (as discussed in the previous section) that the main objective of the above support services is to motivate students, keep them on the right track, encourage them to make use of the facilities provided and above all facilitate their learning.

Definitions of student support vary. Thorpe describes it as the elements of an open learning system capable of responding to a particular individual student (Thorpe, 1988). Hui (1989) regards it as the support incorporated within the self-learning materials, the learning system and assignment marking, while Wright (1991) refers to it as the requisite student services essential to ensure the successful delivery of learning experiences at a distance. Simpson (2000) defines student support in the broadest term as all activities beyond the production and delivery of course materials that assist in the progress of

students in their studies. Simpson (2000) suggests that it falls into two broad areas. The first is academic (tutorial) support – which deals with supporting students with the cognitive, intellectual and knowledge issues of specific courses or sets of courses. The second is non-academic or counselling support – the support of students in the affective and organisational aspects of their studies.

In addition, Robinson (1995) has viewed student support as having three components: the elements that make up the system, their configuration, and the interaction between them and the students, which creates its dynamics. Elements of the system are:

- personal contact between students and support agents, individuals or groups, face-to-face or via other means;
- peer contact;
- the activity of giving feedback to individuals on their learning;
- additional materials such as advice notes or guides;
- study groups and centres, actual or electronic; and
- access to libraries, laboratories, equipment, and communication networks.

Configuration of these elements varies, depending on the requirements of course design, infrastructure of the country, distribution of students, available resources, and the values and philosophy of the open and distance learning institution/provider.

The power of the new information technology lends a new dimension to the concept of student support. The regard for face-to-face interaction even though being limited in distance education, as patently superior to all other forms of interaction, will be overcome with the widespread use of the new information and communication technology (Manjulika and Reddy, 1996). Just as electronic media have transformed the instructional methods they can also transform the method of providing support to distance education students.

### **2.3.2 Types of support services**

In this section I will be differentiating between the types of support services provided to distance education students through various stages of their study course, namely the pre-entry stage, the course stage and the post-course stage.

#### ***The pre-entry stage***

At the pre-entry level, the situation very often is that the student feels something wanting in his/her life or has a wish to change his/her situation. A student may not be very clear about what he/she wants to do. At this stage the prospective student needs a mixture of information, advice and counselling. Prospective distance education students would need to know about the courses, entry requirements, application procedures, the university/institution, fees charged, the teaching-learning process, and recognition of prior learning.

Manjulika and Reddy (1996) and Simpson (2000) include the following types of support required at the pre-entry stage:

- guidance about the types of programmes and courses available;
- pre-admission counselling with regard to selection of courses;
- information regarding the instructional system, entry requirements, fee structure, duration of the programme of study and recognition of prior learning; and
- advice regarding fee reimbursement and fee concessions.

#### ***The course stage***

The first stage must help the student to identify a line of action. Once a student has been admitted, the student will be issued with the necessary course materials and assignments along with details as how to use study guides or programme guides. At this stage the student may be alarmed at how much work seems to be involved and may be apprehensive about the possibilities of completing the course of study successfully. During this stage

the student may also not feel very confident or may become less motivated and think of dropping out. In addition, certain personal and non-academic problems may crop up which may affect his/her studies. Finally, the student may suffer from examination anxiety. Manjulika and Reddy (1996) and Simpson (2000) suggest that a student might require the following support during this stage:

- an induction/orientation into the instructional system of the organisation;
- distribution of self-instructional materials and assignments;
- provision of television programmes, radio broadcasts, teleconferencing, and the schedules thereof;
- provision of library facilities;
- organisation of experiential learning, practicals at science laboratories, computer laboratories and industry;
- organisation of assignment evaluation and feedback through tutor comments;
- development of study skills, time management and structuring of the learning process;
- provision of counselling and tutoring services (including face-to-face tutorials and schedules thereof);
- admission and assessment criteria and examination procedures;
- communication of results of assessment; and
- provision of relevant, accurate and unbiased information.

### ***The post course stage***

At this stage the student has taken the required examination. Manjulika and Reddy (1996) and Simpson (2000) suggest that the student might now seek the following support:

- communication of final results/grades/awards;
- advice regarding career advancement/job opportunities/future prospects; and

- guidance and developmental counselling with respect to re-registration in case of failure.

## **2.4 SUMMARY**

In this chapter attention has been given to the rationale for providing student support services. Specifically, the need to know much more about the students enrolled in an open and distance learning institution has been argued for, not only to respond to what they want and need within the constraints of an institution's operating environment, but also to personalise student support so that it incorporates students' own experiences and allows them to set their own learning objectives. In addition, a scrutiny of challenges unique to the open and distance learning mode of delivery has been charted. The discussion of these challenges focused on the contractual elements to student support, which bring certain responsibilities for both provider and student. Student support is therefore not just a liberal notion.

Key issues related to the provision of student support services were also put forward by concentrating on the specific support services needed by adult distance education students through various stages of the study course.

In the next chapter, specific reference will be made to national and international perspectives on the development and provision of student support services in open and distance learning.

## CHAPTER 3

# NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES IN OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING

### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

Open and distance learning is more than 150 years old and dates back to the early days of one social revolution – the “Penny Post” with Isaac Pitmans’s correspondence courses in shorthand (Simpson, 2000). Many revolutions later, particularly the Information Technology revolution, an explosive growth in open and distance learning occurred worldwide. There are nearly 30 open universities operating in First and Third World environments and countless other organisations working at non-higher education levels. Many conventional institutions have perceived the “sunrise industry” potential of open and distance learning and have set up subdivisions to develop it. It is probable that open and distance learning now represents the fastest growing sector in education worldwide.

Though there is growing recognition of the need to build student support into distance education programmes, it has not received the attention it deserves. This may be because it is seen as less glamorous than other activities in open and distance learning or peripheral to the real business of developing course materials. Perhaps it may be that institutions accept that students’ personal issues are a far greater factor in dropout than any institutional factors (Paul, 1988). Furthermore, in many instances, managers of open and distance learning programmes have not often been in the position of new and

unqualified students on a distance education course and find it hard to empathise with how highly such students value support.

However, with a tighter focus on retention rates in open and distance learning, the introduction of information and communication technology into student support and developing interest in student outcomes, there is increased interest in student support in open and distance learning and the role it plays. For example, Potter (1998:60) offers this observation:

*For some time, the emphasis on distance education has been on preparing courses, and then on finding and implementing means of making them available off campus. In recent years, however, there has been evidence of increasing critical reflection on an approach that may have given technology prominence over the learner. Institutions and distance education authors are demonstrating greater concern with human questions relating, for example, to access and participation, learner characteristics, persistence and dropout rates, and factors that contribute to success and satisfaction for distance education learners.*

Furthermore, there is a tendency to drop out by enrolees in distance education and Keegan (2001) suggests that this tendency can be attended to by planning quality course materials, but above all, by providing adequate student support services for the avoidance of avoidable dropout.

Moreover, Simpson (2002) noted that, as open and distance learning provision grows, so competition mounts. Where students have a choice, they will judge institutions by both the quality of the course materials they produce and probably even more by the standards of student support they offer.

It is therefore imperative that open and distance learning institutions attend to and accept the challenge to seriously consider the development of adequate student support services to come to the point where this aspect of education is no longer looked upon by the public as an add-on.

### **3.2 ASPECTS TO BE CONSIDERED FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF ADEQUATE STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES**

There is no set pattern of student support in open and distance learning. The nature of student support services varies from institution to institution.

Among distance educators there are basically two different approaches to student support: one relying exclusively on non-contiguous communication, namely communication by media like the written, recorded or tele-transmitted word; the other contiguous, including face-to-face contacts as more or less self-evident elements of distance education.

In addition, there are two distinct types of students, those taking the odd course to supplement their education and those who study at a distance to acquire a degree or a similar measure of formal competence.

Furthermore, there are large-scale and small-scale approaches to distance education. The large-scale approach implies developing courses for very large numbers of students, which means printing or producing in other forms hundreds or thousands of copies of each individual course, while at the same time providing individual tuition through tutors' marking and commenting on individual students' work as well as offering face-to-face tutorials. The small-scale approach usually expects of a course-author that he/she should teach students through distance-mode and also at times, face-to-face. The large-scale approach in most cases consciously benefits from the economies of scale (Sewart, Keegan and Holmberg, 1983). As the number of students increases, so the average cost declines by spreading the fixed cost over more units. There must be sufficient numbers of students to allow economies of scale to be reaped.

It is evident that the differences indicated result in different perspectives on how student support should be developed and in the actual practice of providing it. However, a common denominator in most systems where responsibility is taken for student support is the continuity of concern (Sewart,



Keegan and Holmberg, 1983), hence the importance of discussing the factors affecting the development of student support services in the following paragraphs.

### **3.2.1 Factors affecting the development of student support services**

Many factors contribute to the development of a student support system. No student support system can be designed in isolation. The factors that need to be considered while designing a student support system are: the aims and resources of the institution; the instructional package employed; the target audience and also the socio-economic educational culture in which it operates and the level of availability of media at the homes/workplaces of the target audience. Reid (1995) identifies four broad themes specific to the development and management of student support services in open and distance learning, namely:

- ownership: institutional and student perspectives;
- open and distance vs. traditional education and learning;
- meeting students' needs; and
- autonomy, accountability, support and control.

Having teased out some of the major factors affecting the development of student support services, consideration will now be given to each of these broad themes in the following paragraphs.

#### **3.2.1.1 *Ownership: institutional and student perspectives***

Institutional perspectives of student support will lie within one of two positions. The first position is complementary, viewing student support as an essential, integral component of the teaching-learning process, one that has the student as the central focus. The second position is compensatory, regarding students as having deficits in learning that need to be fixed, advocating specialists to relieve tutors of their responsibilities for meeting individual needs (Reid, 1995). Nunan (1993) describes support in these circumstances as being applied in a “reactive” fashion. However, the institutional perspective is equally a pragmatic one. In this regard, Carter and Clilverd (1993) take a

problem-solving approach using an integrated student support system, putting together a range of specialist options at the phase of enrolment or learning where problems occur. Students without support are likely to delay completion of a programme or drop out altogether (Rowntree, 1992; Dallas and Lynch, 1992), and support is evidently most needed early in the first year of study of a programme (Roberts, 1984).

Whatever their position, all institutions are preoccupied with attrition rates (Brindley, 1988; Roberts, 1984; Garland, 1993). Even where a few institutions appear to lack real commitment to students as individuals, withdrawals of students inevitably in turn means some degree of withdrawal of government funding.

The student perspective may well be necessarily different from the institutional perspective. According to Rowntree (1992), students require more individual personal support than general support, demanding that what is provided relates to their specific and unique concerns and needs. Rowntree (1992), for example, cites evidence that supports the view that institutional use of technology is mechanical and impersonal, and therefore often not always viewed positively by students. In addition, Reid (1995) identifies four important areas associated with a student perspective:

- access to academic support and other students – preferably through direct contact;
- student learning characteristics – accommodation of a range of learning styles, rather than mere emphasis on self-study packages;
- access to library and other resources of learning – especially for independent study material; and
- understanding of the student learning environment and background – awareness of the family and work commitments of students.

### **3.2.1.2 *Open and distance versus traditional education and learning***

The student support services offered by different open and distance learning institutions may be very similar, but there are differences between traditional learning institutions and open and distance learning institutions. Open and distance learning, for example, has certain traditions: 1) an emancipatory tradition, 2) a liberal tradition and 3) an industrial tradition (Reid, 1994b), and these traditions require a different orientation for student support.

Through its emancipating tradition, open and distance learning is linked not only with the opening up of opportunities, but also with the breaking down of barriers. In this sense it is associated with students previously denied access to education. While this can be construed as operating in a personal sense, it is linked, too, with the breaking down of structural constraints – institutional, social, cultural, and political/economical. The management of open and distance learning creates institutional responsibilities for access and equity. In this respect, Reid (1995) is of the opinion that there is a very delicate balance between the responsibility of the institution to give career and academic counselling, and to provide pathways through bureaucracy, acting as an advocate for students, while also preserving its own integrity and maintaining an academic function.

Reid (1995) further notes that the liberal tradition of open and distance learning is linked to its emancipatory tradition. There is a general recognition of the merit or ideal of universal access to education, lifelong learning and “second chance” learning, and the belief that for a variety of reasons these are not achieved by a considerable number of people within the conventional/traditional education system, and agreement that, historically what an institution has offered has not always been matched by individual student expectations. A key principle here for those involved in providing student support is that many students will have mixed feelings about their learning, and they will require sensitivity in support.

Open and distance learning also has an industrial tradition. This tradition is training-based and justified by cost-effectiveness, flexibility and more accurate

targeting of specific skills for employees (Peters, 1989). Furthermore, it allows industry to assume responsibility and control for its own training, strengthening individual autonomy, adaptability and individual independence, which are seen as key business skills (Reid, 1995). In addition, open and distance learning is often seen as the most flexible and the only really equitable response to upskilling, training or retraining large numbers in the workforce. It is attractive to employers because of the control they can exercise and the minimum disruption to normal work (Department of Employment, 1993). Therefore, the relationship of student support with its local business community is critical, as is its ability to work flexibly on business sites and to assess employer and employee needs. There is therefore no reason to contextualise student support as remaining within the confines of institutions.

### **3.2.1.3 *Meeting students' needs***

Historically students have had to “buy” what providers have produced in whatever form it has been “sold”, rather than providers marketing their materials based on what students want and need. However, whether terms such as “customer” or “client” are used, there is no doubt that students are more discerning and demanding than they have been in the past – more and more, they demand to be satisfied. In meeting this student satisfaction, those involved in providing and supporting open and distance learning take on responsibilities towards the student. One of these responsibilities is to gather information about students and use it in a way to enhance learning. Tait (1999) substantiates this issue further by saying that it may seem obvious, but it is necessary to assert that the characteristics of the student body make up an essential and indeed central element in the development and management of a student support system.

In ways that are familiar from service industry, it is necessary to incorporate elements of client or customer centredness in approaches to the delivery of student support services. Many educational institutions collect statistics and information regarding the characteristics of their students. However, what is more challenging is to use the information in practical ways in the

development and management of student support services. In constructing student support services, the key task is to acknowledge the identity of the student, complementing the mass-produced course materials which by virtue of their nature, and as a condition of their effectiveness, are unable to do so. The function of student support services is to mediate the standard and uniform elements of course materials and other administrative services, primarily through recognising differentiated student needs. In this regard, Reid (1995) indicates that support services for students are faced with the practicalities of personalising learning: with assisting students to incorporate their own views and experiences into their learning, in aiding students to set personal goals and objectives, and in fostering the ability to monitor personal progress.

Two major emphases are apparent in the relationship of open and distance learning to learning: imparting knowledge and developing the whole person. Providing institutions are therefore faced with what can be the dilemma of developing the whole person, while at the same time having the responsibility and expectation of teaching substantial amounts of knowledge in some form. The latter is easier to achieve, with an emphasis on opening up access to knowledge which is seen as a commodity and assessed through recognition of competencies, and provided by packaging material and distributing it through distance education. The former, however, is far more difficult to achieve because it assumes the role of facilitation, of using the strength and experience of the tutor and student support staff to assist the student to build upon experience, competence and interest.

According to Ross (1990), it is theoretically possible and obviously desirable to increase student autonomy by increasing student choice in areas of outcomes, content, learning resources and assessment. It ties in with general institutional expectations for adult students (Hodgson, 1989). Yet it has been pointed out (Burge, 1988; Candy, 1991; Paul, 1990a; Robinson, 1992), that one should not assume that the students of open and distance learning institutions are autonomous, independent or self-directed. Tait (1999) holds that while a minority of students in any institution regard themselves as almost

entirely autonomous, the majority welcome student support services, and in fact always demand more. According to Holmberg (1986), there is a school of thought that finds it tactless if tutors or other representatives of the student support department, without being asked to do so, approach mature students with questions about why they submit no work, why they work slowly, and so forth, and with offers of support. The view held means treating students as potentially independent people to whom it is left not only to decide, but expressly to state, if and to what extent they want support or advice. The opposite view implies that it is a social duty to interfere, to prevent failure and to promote success. The two approaches contrasted pose a problem to many liberal distance educators who would like to treat their students as mature, responsible personalities, but who still feel there is a duty to spontaneously support them and, if at all possible, prevent them from experiencing failure. Reid (1995) argues that irrespective of this argument, with student choice comes student responsibility for the outcomes of the choice, and provider responsibility for supplying detail and support that enables the student to make effective choices.

#### **3.2.1.4      *Autonomy, accountability, support and control***

Student support often combines central and regional services in a seamless integrated service to students, taking student enquiry as the focus. Yet, inevitably in any model based on these premises, there are central and regional tensions. Both Reid (1995) and Tait (1995) cite Paul (1990b), who outlines the classic tensions between the need for regional advocacy and flexibility on the one hand, and central policy and control on the other. Regional presences introduce management difficulties for any organisation, for the primary issues are balances between power, control and support on the one hand, and flexibility and regional need on the other. None of these is specific organisationally to open and distance learning systems, nor does open and distance learning appear to have been more successful than other kinds of organisations in managing these issues (Tait, 1995). Any natural and expected differences in central and regional perspectives are complicated by the values and management style of the institution, yet there are basic understandings which if assimilated can reduce the hazards of potential

conflict, especially for those working directly with students. Paul's (1990b) major conclusion is the importance of staff development and training, in order to diminish the gap between perceptions of the range of individuals, whether based centrally at headquarters or at a regional location or working part-time at home.

In addition, Sewart (1993:8), examines student support services from management perspectives, and notes that the most relevant management theories are those which are system-based, using the analogy of the organism, rather than the machine. He also notes the importance of service industry rather than production approaches and argues that the management of student support needs to take account of the needs of students as expressed by them.

It is evident that the quality and nature of the development and management of student support services provided by the teaching staff and managers depend on a number of factors, ranging from professional competence, experience, values, assumptions about open and distance learning, and available resources. In line with the above, Bhalalusesa, (2001) found that the nature of the academic support with which the teaching staff provide students, is influenced by the way in which they perceive their role of teaching at a distance, their professional training and orientation, assumptions they have about what constitutes a good distance education student, and above all their ability to work within the system. These factors are influenced by the quality of support the teaching staff get from the central management to facilitate their work performance – for example, skills training, facilities, and opportunities for staff development. Similarly, the nature and quality of the management support provided by staff of regional centres not only depends on their experience in managing regional centres but also on the support they get from the central management in terms of the resources available to facilitate provision of student support services. Therefore, the inputs to the micro-systems of the teaching staff and the managers determine the type of support they are able to render to students.

However, Bhalalusesa (2001) argues that it should be noted that while the institution acts as an anchor to support the student, much of what is experienced in open and distance learning depends on what is going on both at the interpersonal (immediate social environment) and intrapersonal (the personal) levels. It is evident that adult distance education students learn while living within a social-cultural context that may or may not be supportive to learning endeavours. For example, in many communities, it is more acceptable for a man to withdraw from social activities to fulfil his academic ambitions than for a woman to withdraw from her traditional, female, social activities. Some women students have to seek consent from their husbands, and perform their domestic responsibilities alongside their studies. Normally these domestic responsibilities are given first priority. In fact, they often set even higher standards for themselves in their domestic and mothering roles in attempting to compensate for the changes they have to make to fit in their studies (Kirkup and Von Prümmer, 1997). Most students study in a state of exhaustion and the workplace or home becomes their study environment. Unless these environments are conducive and supportive to their studies, their academic performance is bound to suffer. Sometimes they face obstacles within society arising from the fact that adult study is unusual, particularly for women. Kirkup and Von Prümmer (1997) also found that organised learning, especially for women, is not an accustomed pattern of adult life. This illustrates how the immediate social and cultural environment may act as a barrier to women's effort to advance them academically. Certainly, the gendered social world has taught the society, including the women themselves, to believe and accept that being a wife and mother is a natural and biological thing. Overall, students' accounts indicate that women struggle hard when they study by distance education (Bhalalusesa, 2001 and Kirkup and Von Prümmer, 1997). They take on enormous workloads. They face opposition from many in society, and sometimes from their own husbands. Despite these difficulties, women sacrifice their precious time and money in order to continue their education.

It is clear that successful learning depends on the extent to which these elements are supportive, and also on how the student's role is able to fit with



other roles. Apart from these social factors, other factors including the geographical location of the student, the accessibility and availability of facilities, and the student's financial position all influence the student's ability to learn successfully at a distance.

At the intrapersonal (personal) level, it is clear that students in open and distance learning have to take full responsibility for their own learning. They have to exercise independence in terms of planning, timing and carrying out individual study. They have to possess the ability to employ appropriate learning strategies, and to know how to go about and approach the learning task. Therefore, they need to possess a strong sense of self-motivation to pursue self-directed learning. They have to be resilient to resist the problems and difficulties of learning at a distance. Consequently, in order to understand the support needed to promote successful distance learning, one has to look at the several sources of support holistically.

In conclusion, the management of student support services has to engage with at least the following key issues:

- distribution and remoteness of staff and services;
- the contribution to the reduction of student attrition; and
- quality issues where service rather than production is the key activity.

### **3.2.2 Institutional arrangements for the development of student support services**

The institutional arrangements for student support in open and distance learning institutions represent a bottom-up approach, which has resulted from an analysis of who and where students actually are. The idea is to provide a range of services, which is as local as possible with the objective of preventing dropouts, assisting weaker students and counselling individuals with personal problems.

However, developments in support service operations today involve a shifting of concerns of support services away from the amelioration of individual

student problems towards a more obvious involvement in the interactive instructional process. As a result of the change in the needs of students, curricular changes and the advent of multimedia systems, the role of institutions in developing student support has undergone changes. In addition, these changes have resulted in a move towards student-centred learning. This has led to the redefinition of the very concept of support services and has taken it from a marginal and supplementary service to an integral role in the instructional package, actively promoting the intellectual development of the distance education student through continuous interaction and the student's active participation in the learning process.

### **3.2.2.1 *Change in students' needs***

Factors such as the necessity for life-long learning, geographic mobility, and the recognition of equity groups have combined to significantly increase the number and variety of distance education students. This shift in demand and institutional response implies corresponding changes in the nature of student support. The institutional context for a changed support role has resulted in a movement towards a student-centred model which represents the form in which student support should be provided. This has led to student support being a more integrated and comprehensive system and an all-pervasive and central educational component of open and distance learning. In this regard, Tinto (1975) suggests that an institution's response should not be limited to the problem of retention but should consider also the broader goal of student development, which essentially means adopting a student-centred approach.

### **3.2.2.2 *Access and achievement***

The principles of open learning and the practice of distance education were initially established to improve accessibility to post-secondary education. The essential elements of most institutional access policies included rolling enrolment dates, the removal of entry requisites, and the convenience of home study – the latter designed to accommodate the personal situations of students with job and family responsibilities. Garrison and Baynton (1987) expanded the concept of accessibility from access-of-entry to include access-of-results. Institutions are therefore obliged to provide the necessary support

to ensure achievement and completion. This has resulted in the changes in institutional views about their responsibility to support students and effectively encourage them to complete their course.

### **3.2.2.3 Curriculum changes**

According to Neary (2002), the notion of student-centred learning lies at the heart of the transition from the transmission mode, through the transaction mode to the transformation mode in curriculum design.

The function of education in the transmission mode is to convey facts, skills and values to students. These are transmitted in one direction, with an emphasis on control and on the prediction of the learning process.

In education as a transaction, the individual is seen as purposive and intentional and, in the role of the student, as being capable of rational problem solving. The central element of transaction is that learning involves a dialogue between the student and the curriculum, during which the student reconstructs knowledge through dialogue.

The transformation mode focuses more on personal and social change than do the others. In this mode of instructional design, the student and curriculum are seen as interrelated. It is based on the assumption that people need to seek personal fulfilment and they can do so through the learning process, thus moving towards a student-centred view of learning.

### **3.2.2.4 Repositioning the student**

In the conventional model of distance education, the student was considered as a consumer of packaged information. This characterises the traditional “industrial” model of distance education as articulated by Peters (1989). In contrast students are today seen as more active participants in the learning process. Kaye and Rumble (1991) attribute this change to a number of factors such as:

- wider access to new technology;

- growing demand from the business community for continuing education for employees;
- increasing competition for part-time students; and
- a move towards a “post Fordist” society with its emphasis on addressing the needs of the individual before those of the institution.

These factors contributed to the concept of student-centred designs with student support systems being more responsive to students’ personal and intellectual growth.

### **3.2.2.5 *Advent of multimedia systems***

A stage has been reached where it is possible to operate distance education programmes worldwide using the multimedia systems for administration of courses as well as for offering student support services. Open and distance learning’s use of any technology, high or low, familiar or innovative, is ideally motivated by the desire to make courses more accessible and convenient for students. The impetus for learning in a technological age is to make the experience of learning more accessible and effective for students by using the right tools in the right way (McHenry and Bozik, 1997). Increasingly, even in programmes which are not really “distance” (those that are still campus-based to a great extent), the place and time of at least some teaching and learning interactions are shifting more to those chosen by the student, supported by various technologies.

However, several factors must be considered whenever the use of multimedia is planned for in open and distance learning, as uses of multimedia will increasingly distinguish institutions or providers focused on students’ needs from those primarily interested in profit or market share. According to McHenry and Bozik (1997) four issues must be considered in decisions about the use of multimedia in open and distance learning:

- the impact of multimedia on options to students in place and time of access to learning;
- types of communication and interaction needed;

- the reorganisation of the learning environment to emphasise students' needs; and
- the practical question of availability of the desired multimedia for the purposes we have in mind.

For most open and distance learning institutions, the reason for using multimedia in distance education is to reduce barriers of separation, and thereby lessen isolation and, in the worst case, student dropout or failure. For some, the use of multimedia is a tool for communication and interaction, and a means for creating presence and, ultimately, interrelationships among the parties involved. For others, the use of multimedia may only be a “delivery vehicle”. Both may use the same media for different uses, but the impact on the learning environment and the experiences of students distinguish the opportunistic from the more credible.

It is important to recognise that the concept of multimedia use as a means for providing necessary interaction rests on certain principles: that interaction is essential to true learning, that it is the student's experience which is important in assessing the value of multimedia use, and that the role and the traditional function of the institution and the tutor must adapt to the unique needs of distance education students. The competition among institutions, public and private, traditional and new, will increasingly be about how these principles are recognised.

Effective and appropriate use of multimedia grant greater interaction and user control in distance learning situations, thus empowering the student. McHenry and Bozik (1997) argue that open and distance learning by its nature is more student-centred. They cite the following differences favouring distance education over more traditional forms:

- more individualised treatment;
- more student activity, less teacher focus;
- more student responsibility and choice;
- more emphasis on collaboration, less on competition; and
- more options for access (place and time independence).

The advent of multimedia resulted in open and distance learning being more centred on the individual student, and more demanding that the student participate and perform autonomously and with self-direction. From the point of view of multimedia use, the open and distance learning environment makes use of various tools and media to permit access to people and information, and for exchanging ideas. Overall, this environment should offer the student more options – for content, access, interaction and expression.

The previous chapter outlined challenges unique to the open and distance learning mode of delivery, which must be overcome, and suggested that student support services should be in the ascendancy at all distance education institutions. Against these challenges and the above account on aspects to be considered for the planning and development of adequate student support services, it is evident that learning and teaching is distance education-oriented if it takes account of the special conditions of the world in which distance education students live and of the special conditions pertaining to open and distance learning.

With distance education-oriented teaching, students must be continuously motivated, guided during studies they have planned and organised themselves, stimulated to communicate and cooperate formally and informally with fellow students, and with the help of a differentiating counselling system, must be observed, addressed individually, and taken seriously. These special preconditions for students studying by open and distance learning are important for academic teaching and should not be neglected when planning, developing and evaluating this teaching method.

### **3.3 PERSPECTIVES ON TEACHING AND LEARNING MODELS SPECIFIC TO INSTITUTIONS**

In this section the structures and procedures of some open and distance learning universities that operate in both industrial and developing countries will be reviewed, to show different perspectives on the development of teaching and

learning models in practice. While the purpose of this study is to evaluate the provision of student support services in open and distance learning at the University of Namibia, the researcher is of the opinion that it is important to have knowledge and understanding of the structures and procedures in other open and distance learning institutions, in order to understand teaching and learning through open and distance learning; how student support services are being developed in different parts of the world; what kind of networks have been set up and what technologies are being used for delivery of programmes and to support distance education students.

Furthermore, discovering these structures and procedures could inform and contribute to the theoretical as well as the practical aspects necessary to be considered as possible agents of change to decide on specific criteria and strategies for improving the provision of student support services.

With regard to the methods and media used for teaching and learning, distance education is more variable and flexible than any form of academic teaching (Peters, 2001) and theoretically, it is able to develop an unusually large number of educational structures. However, when large distance education institutions plan their teaching and learning operations, they develop practical institution-specific models that become more inflexible over the years. As a result, the focus of this section will be to identify and critically review these models to be used as benchmarking criteria to strengthen distance education teaching and learning at the University of Namibia in general and the provision of student support services in particular.

The University of South Africa (UNISA), the Open University in the United Kingdom (UKOU) and the FernUniversität in Germany were selected for this purpose. The following criteria were used:

- The correspondence model at UNISA has certainly its value in practice. It has contributed to the success of commercial distance education and it was quite obvious that after the establishment of a reliable postal system, correspondence was able to become the most important and therefore the

most obvious communication medium. Consequently, it was able to bridge the gap between teachers and students.

The taking over of elements of letter writing and using them in presenting teaching content was, nevertheless, an education invention that was certainly not obvious from the start. For the first time, a method specific to distance education was developed, whose aim was to take away the students' feeling of isolation by at least bringing the teacher into their imaginations.

- The United Kingdom's Open University (UKOU) has a unique mission statement – open as to people, open as to places, open as to methods, and open as to ideas – an “open access” policy that attracts students from a variety of backgrounds, all seeking a divergent range of study goals. With this mission in mind, the UKOU regards it as vital to secure the best possible chances for its students' success. As a result, key features of this early model of open and distance learning included the design, development and production of courses through the use of teams of academics, educational technologists and media specialists; mass dissemination via a range of different media including print and broadcasting; further dissemination through the use of personal media such as audio and video; and personalised assessment and support to individual students through the allocation of personal tutors.

There is no other form of academic teaching in which students are supported so intentionally, deliberately, carefully and with promise of success. In this context, the Open University's first vice-chancellor noted that the structuring of teaching programmes by course teams is an original idea of the UKOU and it is its “most important contribution to teaching practice at the tertiary level” (Perry, 1976:91). According to Peters (2001), this idea has gained ground in other distance education universities, of which UNISA is the most recent example.



- Subsequent to the establishment of the FernUniversität, the 1970s witnessed the teaming up of nearly 80 German universities to form the University Association for Distance Education in Multimedia (Kappel, Lehmann and Loeper, 2002). This resulted in the launch of collaborative distance education projects and material. However, in the absence of a cohesive infrastructure, the country's varied distance education approaches were temporarily brought to a standstill. Confronted with this situation, distance education activities were consolidated through the establishment of the FernUniversität in Hagen, a higher education institution patterned after the UKOU.

Despite political objections, the development of the FernUniversität continued apace, primarily because it was the first and only institution to offer flexible basic university degree programmes designed to address the needs of working adults and of those who for reasons of geographical or temporal constraints would not be able to access higher education. To this day, the FernUniversität retains a dominant position among Germany's distance education providers and it also plays a significant role in the Association of European Open Universities.

### **3.3.1 Correspondence studies: the University of South Africa**

#### **3.3.1.1 *Background***

The University of South Africa (UNISA) is the oldest distance education university in the world, and before 1970 it was the only autonomous distance education university. Its history dates back to the establishment of the University of the Cape of Good Hope, which was founded in 1873 and which originally held examinations only (Labuschagne, 2000). It was not until 1946 that the university gradually began to provide teaching and it carried out pioneering work in the field of distance education in the 1950s. UNISA is a distance education university rich in tradition with its roots in the nineteenth century.

This special feature has marked its educational structure through to the present. UNISA is a "correspondence university" that has taken over the concept and methods of commercial correspondence colleges and developed them further.

At present, the university is making efforts to adapt its teaching and learning system to more modern trends. According to statements from the university, it is in a process of transformation and renewal. It sent a group to study the Open University in the United Kingdom and the Open University in the Netherlands, to gather ideas from each. The impressions were put into two reports (UNISA, 1995a and 1995b), which document how representatives, who come from two different eras in distance education, of teaching and learning systems met.

UNISA is making efforts to compensate for the differences that were noted. It has started to develop courses through course teams, and experiments with teleconferencing have already taken place. An interactive video-conferencing link has been established between the university in Pretoria and the students in Cape Town.

### **3.3.1.2 Institutional profile**

With around 130 000 students, UNISA is the largest university in South Africa and one of the 10 largest distance education universities in the world. The university, according to its official commission, is to be open to all those who fulfil the entrance requirements. The university is to be involved in both teaching and research, and in community service. It is to be guided equally by the principles of equality of opportunity and high academic quality (SAIDE, 1995:4). UNISA fulfils this task and has had remarkable success in several aspects. Firstly, it meets an actual demand, as the number of students has risen from around 5 500 in 1955 to around 130 000 today. Secondly, the proportion of women students is satisfactorily high; in fact, at 56% it has a higher proportion than of men ([<http://www.unisa.ac.za/about>]).

The University is equipped with 1 393 full- and part-time academics who work in six faculties: humanities, economics, education, law, science, and theology. In greatest demands are humanities (55 102 students) and economics (40 797 students).

### **3.3.1.3 *Instructional system***

Teaching is based on courses for which individual university lecturers are solely responsible. They draw up instructions for studying and tutorial papers, which are printed and sent to students in South Africa and abroad. The tutorial papers are usually related to selected textbooks and show the passages that are to be read. There are set assignments for each course, which are corrected, marked and commented on. To make enrolment easier, there are provincial centres in Johannesburg, Durban and Cape Town, which are also important for teaching as they contain branches of the university library, which has over 1.5 million volumes (Labuschagne, 2000). If students encounter difficulties with their self-studies, they are invited to visit a professor on the campus in Pretoria, or to telephone or write. Vacation schools are also held in Pretoria, but only a few students are able to attend. Examinations are held in the 400 examination centres administered by the University.

Though efforts have been made to adapt its teaching and learning system to more modern trends, the following table gives a summary of the components of teaching and learning behaviour presently still in place at UNISA.

**TABLE 3.1**  
**Components of teaching and learning behaviour**  
**at the University of South Africa**

Teaching behaviour	Learning behaviour
Writing course material	Reading instructions for studying
Correcting assignments	Studying textbooks
Compiling examination questions	Obtaining literature with the help of the library services
Marking examination papers	Advice via post or telephone
Advising and support	Writing assignments
If necessary, chairing discussion groups	If necessary, attending vacation schools in Pretoria
	Sitting examination in examination centres

There is no doubt that UNISA has made a considerable contribution to the increase in the equality of opportunity in the field of higher education. This can be verified simply by referring to the large number of students currently enrolled who were unable, for whatever reason, to study at a conventional university and who have received an opportunity to obtain a university education. Furthermore, the enrolment and graduation figures contain considerable numbers of Africans, Indians and Coloureds from the previously disadvantaged majority (Labuschagne, 2000 and [<http://www.unisa.ac.za/about>]). The university has therefore fulfilled a remarkable humanitarian mission.

This being said, Peters (2001) argues that the university's educational structure is that of a commercial correspondence institution. Basically, the courses consist of instructions, advice and support for the independent reading of textbooks or other academic literature. The dominant and decisive medium here is the written word, in the form of study guides and tutorial letters.

Evaluating this model in the light of the advances that have been made in the field of open and distance learning, Peters (2001) brings some of the following deficiencies to the fore:

- Little value is placed on the development of self-instructional structured distance education courses, because work is done with printed study instructions. In general, the printed working documents are only very slightly educational, because no special techniques for presentation are used; the use of graphic and other media is underdeveloped; activities of students, for example reading, writing, solving problems and research, are not harmonised methodologically with one another and integrated into the learning process, but above all because the teaching texts hardly provoke any interactive learning at all.
- Support for students is underdeveloped and inadequate. The number of postal contacts between lecturers and students is insufficient to provide continuous feedback on learning progress and continuous motivation to students. Above all, there is a lack of a coordinated regional network of study centres, although events that take place here must be seen as the major component of a teaching and learning system in distance education. The five regional centres in Pretoria, Johannesburg, Durban, Cape Town and Polokwane are, of course, not enough for 130 000 students. Furthermore, the system of tutorial and counselling support is insufficiently developed. Because a considerable number of students come from those parts of the population that are greatly disadvantaged economically and scholastically (Nonyongo, 1993), it should be obvious that more intensive support by tutors in study centres must be provided.
- Technical media are scarcely used in the service of teaching and learning in the distance education system, and where they are used, their use is elementary. This separates UNISA from most other distance education universities of the 1970s and 1980s, in which radio and television and the corresponding audio and videotapes became important elements of strengthening instruction and delivery of teaching programmes. In addition, the preparation for the digital era is still very much in its infancy.
- Specifically, SAIDE (2003) reported regarding UNISA that:

- the institution had low success in terms of completion and throughput rates;
  - there was still too much of a correspondence nature of programmes in comparison with well-functioning distance education; and
  - there was inadequate student support which was exacerbated by the lack of a coordinated regional network of learning centres;
- In addition, Roberts (2004:101) reported that:
    - an analysis of the 25 criteria for quality student support provided by the South African Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) in relation to the current practice at UNISA clearly indicated that some elements were already receiving attention. Unfortunately, the implementation was characterised by:
      - a focus primarily on contact classes not integrated into the course design;
      - some counselling;
      - five learning centres;
      - no integration of activities; and
      - a lack of common understanding of student support.

In other words, the situation is very much the same as 10 years ago.

In spite of these limitations, there is no need to react patronisingly and disapprovingly towards the model of correspondence studies. After all, this system has been tried and tested for over a century. It has enabled mature students and people in employment to obtain a university education. Recognition should therefore be given to how adaptable people's ability to learn is.

### **3.3.2 The great ideal: the Open University in the United Kingdom**

#### **3.3.2.1 Background**

When the term 'open university' is used, the United Kingdom's Open University (UKOU) is referred to, because this was the first to be founded, in 1969, and because it attracted worldwide attention with its special conception and working methods. This university has had spectacular success and is ranked in first place

among the 12 largest and internationally known open universities and the 13 distance education universities in the world (Holmberg, 1994:20).

Peters (2001) ascribes the interest aroused among higher education experts about the UKOU and the attraction of visitors every year from all over the world to:

- the decision of the British government to establish the UKOU exclusively as a university for adult education;
- the opening of the university specifically to cater for applicants without formal university entrance qualifications;
- the granting of credits for results obtained at other universities;
- the continuous and consistent use of television and radio to present subjects;
- the professional development of course material;
- the emphasis placed on support for students in study centres;
- the commitment to continuing education;
- the strategy for using digital communications;
- the university's efficiency, which can be measured by the number of successful students;
- its leading role in distance education research after 25 years; and
- its great international influence in support for other distance education universities, above all in developing countries.

### **3.3.2.2      *Institutional profile***

In 1971, the UKOU started teaching as an autonomous university, financed to a great extent by the government, to provide mature students with a second chance to obtain a university education. The aim was to extend access amongst the UK population to higher education, in particular for persons who were educationally disadvantaged and underrepresented at traditional universities. These efforts are the product of a humanitarian commitment (Open University, 1994:5).

This humanitarian attitude is not only expressed in policy statements but also in the teaching itself. This can be seen immediately in the well-organised support for students from course counsellors and tutors.

Even more important are the efforts to adapt teaching to the special requirements and starting conditions for the university's particular clientele. The foundation courses are a good example of this because they are aimed at compensating for the different levels of preliminary education enjoyed by new students (Ekins, 1997: 194).

From the very start, demand for places at the university was heavy and has in fact continued to increase ever since. In the first year, 24 000 students were enrolled, and by 1990 the university had 90 000 students. The number of applicants for a place was always greater than the number of enrolments (<http://www.open.ac.uk/factsheets>). By 1998 the UKOU had 210 000 students, although this figure includes about 82 000 purchasers of "learning packages", specially developed for self-study. The university is therefore among the largest universities not only in the UK, but also in Europe, and in fact in the world.

The university has six faculties and an Open Business School. Around 800 academic staff are responsible for the development of teaching. Support is provided for students in 12 regional and 250 local study centres, in which tutors and course counsellors work (<http://www.open.ac.uk/factsheets>).

### **3.3.2.3      *Instructional system***

There are primarily two typical teaching and learning situations at the UKOU. The first is where undergraduate/graduate programmes are based on structured printed distance education courses and a series of set books listed especially for these courses. The courses are developed by course teams with special attention to the learning requirements of distance education students. Specialised instructional-technology experts work in these teams alongside the university lecturers. Students work through their study units and use the set books supplied. The study units often refer to teaching programmes on television or radio, but these are also available on tape (video and audio). Each student is



assigned to a tutor, who provides support throughout the study course. About 12 hours per week are planned for working through the course materials. This self-study is complemented by attendance of tutorials in a study centre. The tutors not only supervise face-to-face tutorials but also communicate with students by telephone and post. Conference calls are also possible for telephone tutoring (Robinson, 1993:91). In addition, the structures also include compulsory attendance at residential schools, which are held for teachers and students in the first semester on a university campus and last about one week.

In this approach, students are faced with the task of configuring these elements in such a way that they correspond to their own requirements and circumstances. What they have to do in principle is to find a healthy balance between working alone with the printed material, the teaching programmes provided in the media, the communicative phases in the study centres, and study counselling. Initially, students had to watch television or listen to the radio early in the morning or last thing at night, and at weekends. This loss of the relative independence of time for study was later compensated for by taping the programmes on audio- and video cassettes.

The second teaching and learning situation in the UKOU is where work with “study packages” has been developed alongside the normal distance education courses. This alternative approach has proved its value in particular with graduates in academic professions. The study packages contain not only fully developed courses and working materials, but also audio and video cassettes and, if this is suggested by the kind of learning matter involved, teaching software for computers. In contrast to normal distance education courses, students have the task here of coping with the learning package by themselves, without any support from tutors. They are, however, encouraged to form study groups. Table 3.2 represents the components of teaching and learning behaviour at the UKOU.

**TABLE 3.2**  
**Components of teaching and learning behaviour**  
**at the United Kingdom's Open University**

Teaching behaviour	Learning behaviour
<p><b><i>Professors:</i></b></p> <p>Collaboration in course teams as subject matter specialists</p> <p>Collaboration with experts from the BBC in course teams to develop teaching programmes for radio and television</p> <p><b><i>Tutors:</i></b></p> <p>Support for distance education students</p> <p>Counselling</p> <p>Presiding over face-to-face tutorials</p> <p>Correcting and grading assignments</p>	<p>Reading printed distance education courses</p> <p>Reading additional set books</p> <p>Experimenting in home laboratories</p> <p>Learning with teaching disks</p> <p>Working with teaching CD-ROMs</p> <p>Working through teaching programmes on radio and television</p> <p>Working through teaching programmes on audio and video cassettes</p> <p>Keeping in contact with allocated tutor: face-to-face, in writing, by phone and fax</p> <p>Attending study support sessions</p> <p>Attending face-to-face teaching events, tutorials, seminars</p> <p>Attending residential schools on traditional university campus</p> <p>Taking part in telephone tutorials</p>

Unconventional behaviour in teaching is also required of the professors at the UKOU. Firstly, the professors are not responsible for the teaching programme, for this is the job of a course team, which the professors support purely as

subject-matter specialists. Secondly, they and their staff have to develop educational transmissions, deal with specialists from the British Broadcasting Corporation, and present themselves not only to tens of thousands of students, but also to a much broader interested public.

In addition to this, the UKOU has taken some significant steps into the territory of digital learning. By 1994 it had already developed 11 courses in relation to computer-conferencing and the Internet, and by 1998 this had grown to over 50. Particularly important for the opening up of these new opportunities was a three-month introductory and training course provided by the Institute of Educational Technology, which familiarised university teachers with the possibilities and limits of digital learning. Furthermore, more than 50 courses, of which most are compulsory, had been produced for the area of interactive multimedia applications, mainly on CD-ROM. An additional 56 courses available through the university's residential schools contain a computing element ([\[http://www.open.ac.uk/factsheets\]](http://www.open.ac.uk/factsheets)).

The UKOU stresses the humanitarian aspect of its work more than any other distance education university. Without any reservations it stands by the relatively new group of students, namely mature students, who were unable to have a normal secondary school education and subsequent university education because of unfavourable material and social circumstances. To have offered hundreds of thousands of them a second chance to receive a university education bears witness to a responsible social attitude and aspirations towards fairness and equity. Both of these are constitutive for the UKOU, and these attitudes are reflected in its institutional ethos.

From the point of view of university and distance education academics, the UKOU has played a pioneering role because it established a form of studying that had never been seen before in Europe – or anywhere else in the world. This was achieved through a series of innovations, each of which would have been important in itself. However, their integrated interplay in a new teaching and learning system achieved an enormous innovative force that adapted distance education consistently to receive world-wide notice.

The UKOU, like the University of South Africa, is a single-mode university. However, it differs from the distance education university in South Africa in several important respects. Teaching and learning is, first of all, multidimensional: printed teaching material, teaching programmes on radio and television, digital learning, teaching in study centres and residential schools, and individual counselling all interact with and influence one another. This then establishes multimedia distance education. While it is true that nearly all these forms of teaching and learning can also be found individually in other distance education universities, nowhere else are they so originally combined and professionally constructed as here. The UKOU started a new era of distance education, and it has set new standards ever since.

### **3.3.3 Research as a basis for learning: the FernUniversität in Germany**

#### **3.3.3.1 Background**

A special relationship between teaching and research is generally found in German universities, since universities are regarded as the central part of the knowledge system, its primary task consisting of producing, managing and dealing with knowledge (Peters, 2001). Research is therefore the first priority and its educational function becomes less important. Teaching is something secondary and derivate. It results from the necessity inherent in all research to inform others of its findings, so that they can be subjected to a critical discussion process, and scientific advancement can be made from the knowledge of a single individual. This is why German professors see themselves in the first place as researchers. For them teaching is an additional opportunity to propagate their research findings and train new academics.

This fundamental difference from all other forms of teaching and learning is not without its consequences. For example, Peters (2001:200) points out that:

*This kind of teaching cannot be designed in accordance with educational technology standards – specified learning objectives or curriculum structures – because learning objectives cannot be selected at will and the curriculum is*

*not available either, but arises through the research status of a discipline in the eyes of the competent specialists.*

This participation is offered to students and it is up to them to grow into the scientific process more and more through their own activities. Whether they are successful depends on their intelligence, purposefulness, initiative, perseverance, and patience, but hardly at all from the instructional skill of their teachers. This attitude to teaching and learning is firmly anchored in the consciousness of German professors. As a consequence, they are usually of the opinion that their university differs clearly from all other institutions, which only exercise educational functions. They regard teaching as not being university education in the real sense of the term, because there is no link to the research process, until the postgraduate stage. They further tend to push this form of education in the direction of school learning, where studying is often based on textbooks and not on original contributions by the teachers.

The structure of teaching and learning at the FernUniversität therefore differs from that of distance education universities. In this sense, the FernUniversität is a traditional university. In addition, whereas most distance education universities in the world award Bachelor's degrees, and are therefore primarily devoted to academic teaching, the FernUniversität prepares students for higher degrees where studies lead to a Master's degree, or diploma with the same ranking.

### **3.3.3.2 Institutional profile**

The FernUniversität was founded in 1974 as an autonomous university by an act of the state parliament of North-Rhine Westphalia, and it started teaching in 1975. Like nearly all German universities, the FernUniversität is financed by the state. Although the federal structure of the Federal Republic of Germany means that the university is, and can only be state university, under the federal constitution it is open to applicants from all over Germany and from abroad.

The university's statutory mission is the same as that of other universities, namely the "care and development of science by means of research, teaching and study" (Peters, 2001:202). In this regard there is absolutely no institutional

difference between conventional universities and the FernUniversität. Six faculties were established to fulfil this mission: education, social sciences and humanities; electrical engineering; computer science; law; economics; and mathematics.

From the aspect of educational policy, however, the FernUniversität can be compared with distance education universities in other countries: the idea was to relieve the burden on the overcrowded universities. There was a state of emergency at the time because many applicants for places at university had to wait several years before being admitted. The idea of providing for persons who would have been prevented from studying at university without this emergency, for example, persons in full-time employment, housewives, and the disabled, was secondary (Peters, 2001).

The provision of this kind of distance education was accepted to a surprisingly great extent, and this can be seen by the trends in the number of students. In 1975 there were 1200. Ten years later there were 20 000 and in 2001 there were some 56 000 students (Peters, 2001). At present, the university has 88 professors and 400 full-time other academic staff. In addition, there are about 300 external university teachers who write courses for the departments each year. The university has a relatively dense network of 29 study centres in North-Rhine Westphalia, a wider network of 20 study centres throughout Germany, as well as three in Austria and one each in Switzerland and Hungary. A total of 600 part-time mentors work in the study centres.

It also has its own library, with 614 000 volumes and 3 200 specialist journals that serve the purposes of research and are also available to distance education students.

### **3.3.3.3 *Instructional system***

Teaching via the FernUniversität is carried out in the form of distance education courses sent to the students every two weeks. These contain texts that present the subject matter, make them easier to understand with the help of glossaries and self-tests, and also stimulate and suggest individualised further work with the subject. Assignments serve not only as self-checks on learning advances but

also as checks by the university. Students must complete half of the assignments in a course successfully to be allowed to sit a written examination held at a decentralised location.

Where practical, the presentation of the course material is supplemented by audio-visual and electronic media-based items such as audio and video cassettes, laboratory kits and regular teaching programmes on television. In addition, floppy disks with teaching software and teaching text files on CD-ROM are already in use in a number of courses. A further dimension to the teaching programme is face-to-face teaching in the study centres under the leadership of part-time cooperating mentors. These sessions are supplemented by seminars and study days under the direction of professors. All of these take place at the FernUniversität, in conference halls, or in study centres. Table 3.3 includes a summary of the components of teaching and learning behaviour at the FernUniversität.

**TABLE 3.3**  
**Components of teaching and learning behaviour**  
**at the FernUniversität**

Teaching behaviour	Learning behaviour
Writing course material	Compulsory reading of distance education course units
Supporting external authors	Compulsory working through additional literature
Developing teaching software, teaching files and multimedia programmes	Using additional media in particular courses
Supervising correction work	Optional face-to-face tutorials in study centres
Coordination with tutors	Optional attendance at local study circles
Marking and evaluating examination papers and theses	Compulsory assignments
Holding seminars and study days	Compulsory written examinations
Supporting candidates for doctorates and professorial theses	Possibility of training with the help of PC trainers
	Possibility of learning with interactive trainers in the computer-based training programme

Students spend most time reading the teaching texts and working through the printed course materials. Ideally, they combine this work with continuous reading of relevant primary and secondary literature, which needs to be procured with caution and resourcefulness, because there are several possibilities for doing this. Books and copies of articles can be ordered from the library at the FernUniversität by post, telephone, fax or e-mail.



The study centres provide personal contacts with other students, mentors and sometimes the authors of the study letters. Literature relevant to the course is available here, and electronic media may be used. Students are also encouraged to form study circles with fellow students living nearby.

Courses at the FernUniversität are not constructed in accordance with the principles of instructional technology. With a programme consisting of 1 600 courses, this would be financially impossible and would take too long. The courses are written by the research scientists themselves. They reflect findings and points of view which are directly derived from the scientific process and are therefore authentic.

Peters (2001) notes that apart from having to comply with nationally uniform regulations governing university study and examinations, professors are very much left to themselves in the selection of the subject matter to be taught and how it is presented. They prefer this personal teaching programme, which reflects their own scientific achievements, and for this reason seldom use textbooks, unless they are written by themselves.

However, when writing the courses the professors have to keep to a set, interdisciplinary and formally identical structure, which is developed by the Centre for the Development of Distance Education. This is necessary, because students working alone need to be able to find their way around their material when learning, and this occurs much more easily where there are readily identifiable formal standards in the courses. However, this is not seen as a restriction of academic freedom, because formal regulations must also be observed at conventional universities, for example, regulations regarding the length and standard format of lectures.

Academic teaching is carried out with different media from those in conventional universities. As a result, problems in presentation may easily occur which are not found in conventional universities. Professors therefore need to take advice and seek assistance of experts from the Centre for the Development of Distance Education, for example in questions of visualisation, graphic design, digitalisation

and evaluation. Every effort is taken to develop and design the printed material into a self-instructing medium for distance education students.

The FernUniversität is merely a conventional university using other means. This is often the critique from progressive university-education reformers, because many professors in the FernUniversität are indeed concerned not to deviate from the standards and traditions of conventional universities, especially when it comes to research. However, Peters (2001) states that this opinion is false, because the composition of the student body shows that the FernUniversität is in the first place a university for mature students, with only 9% of the students in the normal age (18-24), while 91% are older. Secondly, the university caters for persons in employment with 75% of its students in full-time employment during their studies. The university also caters for disabled persons unable to leave their homes. All these characteristics differentiate it from conventional universities.

### **3.3.4 Dual-mode instruction: The University of Namibia**

#### **3.3.4.1 Background**

Prior to independence in 1990, the colonial powers established a tertiary education institution, The Academy, which had two components; the Technikon Namibia and the College for Out-of-School Training (COST). Initially, the Academy was affiliated to the University of South Africa (UNISA) until 1985 when, by an Act of Parliament (Act 9 of 1985), it was granted autonomous status and added a third component, the University of Namibia (University of Namibia, 1995).

The Centre for External Studies (CES) was set up as part of the new University of Namibia (UNAM) in August 1992. It grew out of the Department of Distance Teaching of the former Academy. CES is an academic centre of UNAM with faculty status, headed by a Director. It makes quality higher education accessible to adult members of the community by the provision of open learning through distance and continuing education programmes (<http://www.unam.na/centres/ces/index.html>).

In the mid 1980s the Department of Distance Teaching was created in the Academy under the Registrar's office as a purely administrative unit with no academic control, or even influence over any academic activities. Initially, it offered either the University of South Africa courses or courses very closely modelled on UNISA's pure correspondence courses (Dodds, 1996c). It appears therefore that these close links with UNISA (a single mode distance education institution), rather than a conscious policy, were the major determinant in the inclusion of distance education in the Academy's original offerings.

This tradition continued when it started to offer its own courses and the new University of Namibia automatically took over the distance education courses and traditions from the Academy when it was established in 1992. The new university management made a conscious decision to continue with this approach. Therefore, although commitment to the dual-mode system was a historical matter, it continued as desirable and necessary, in line with the new national education policy to make education at all levels available to those sections of society disadvantaged under the Apartheid regime (Möwes and Siaciwena, 2000). In this regard, Angula (1992), then Minister of Education and Culture, stressed the importance of distance education in the Ministry's systematic rigorous programme of educational expansion and improvement:

*Having been bequeathed an insurmountable educational backlog and negligence by the colonial administration, my Ministry was quick to realise that conventional school- and college-based education could not exclusively meet the type of expansion and improvement we envisaged.*

(Angula, 1992: 6)

Angula (1992) further noted that the University of Namibia was to be in charge of distance education at post-secondary level and that programmes in this respect would be developed to address the needs of this target audience. The birth of the University of Namibia under an Act of Parliament (Act 18 of 1992) was followed in 1993 by a proposal from Mr. Kazapua, who later became the Registrar of the University, to establish a Centre for Adult and Continuing

Education and Distance Teaching. During the same year the Centre for External Studies (CES) was established, combining the previous Department of Distance Teaching (renamed the Department of Distance Education) with a new Department of Continuing Education (Dodds, 1996c). In 1994, the Kazapua proposal was developed further by a team comprising Professor Anim of the Faculty of Education, Professor David Macharia of the Adult Education Department of the Ministry of Education and Culture, and Dr. Alan Chadwick of the University of Surrey in the United Kingdom. The proposal was frozen for financial reasons (Dodds, 1996c).

The University of Namibia's First Five Year Development Plan (1995-1999) not only committed the University to continue and expand its distance education services but can also be taken to be the new University's first policy commitment to that mode of delivery. One of the key objectives and goals in the University's First Five Year Development Plan was to address some of "the relics of colonial regimes" and it states in this regard that many Namibians from formerly disadvantaged communities, who were already in employment, needed to have their work skills upgraded and sharpened without having to leave their jobs (University of Namibia, 1995). The development plan noted that such people were scattered throughout the country, especially in regions, that had previously been designated as "homelands". Therefore, "one of the University's key goals and responsibilities is to reach out to the people and to assist them to continue with their education, through the University's Centre for External Studies" (University of Namibia, 1995:9). Consequently, the University's First Five Year Development Plan specifies that the principal objective of the Centre for External Studies "is to contribute to the mission of the university, and of the Ministry of Education and Culture, for extending higher education to people outside the walls of the University, and beyond the city of Windhoek" (University of Namibia, 1995: 28).

Some elements of a dual structure, as in other dual-mode universities, are evident at the University of Namibia. In line with the principle of parity of standards, which underpins most dual-mode distance education systems, full-

time and distance education students register for the same diploma and degree programmes and follow the same curriculum (Möwes and Siaciwena, 2000). The content of the various study programmes is determined by faculties. Strategies and mechanisms have been developed by enabling faculties to have control over the curriculum to ensure parity and uniformity of standards between internal and external courses. Distance education and full-time students have to meet the same admission requirements and are subjected to the same examinations.

The Centre for External Studies continues to serve, among other responsibilities, as an administrative and professional unit through which the university offers some of its degrees by distance education. Instructional design, editing, delivery, and management of administrative and student support services are the responsibility of the CES, while Faculties are responsible for curriculum decisions (content and structure of courses) and writing of course materials, marking and tutoring on a part-time basis, supervised and organised by the CES. All distance education programmes are entirely managed by the CES on the above mix.

#### **3.3.4.2 *Institutional profile***

In 2001, the Senate of the University approved a restructuring of the Centre for External Studies. In the main, therefore, the CES comprises the Department of Materials Development and Instructional Design, the Department of Student Support Services, the Department of Continuing Education and the Administrative Department.

As indicated above, the Centre for External Studies inherited distance education courses from the Academy from which the University was established. The programmes consisted almost exclusively of teacher education certificate and diploma courses for the then University of Namibia and of courses leading to the National Diplomas in Public Administration and Police Science for the Technikon (Dodds, 1999a). In 1995, a decision was taken to phase out all the existing teacher education programmes except the newly introduced Diploma in Education African Languages (DEAL). The

government, having developed a Basic Education Teacher's Diploma in the Ministry of Education and Culture (replacing these programmes) felt that UNAM should be responsible for secondary level teacher training.

At the end of 1995, the Polytechnic of Namibia made a decision to de-link itself from the CES to set up its own Centre for Open and Lifelong Learning. This was followed by the University of Namibia's decision to introduce its first two external degree programmes – the Bachelor of Nursing Science and the Bachelor of Education, which were launched in 1997 and 1998 respectively.

In 1998 a third external degree was launched on a very small and experimental basis – the Bachelor of Business Administration. The latter has been re-launched as a full-scale external degree in 2000.

Furthermore, the Faculty of Education and its Department of Adult and Non-formal Education in particular, in collaboration with CES, launched the Diploma in Adult Education and Community Development towards the end of 2000.

The Mathematics and Science Teachers' Extension Programme (MASTEP) was launched in 2000. This programme is supported by funds from the European Union's Human Resource Development Project, and is run jointly, as a mixed-mode open and distance learning programme, by the Faculty of Science, Faculty of Education and CES. At the end of 2000, Senate approved the creation of a Further Diploma in Education: Mathematics and Science, as the qualification to be awarded to successful graduates.

This was followed by the launch of the Basic Education Teacher's Diploma (BETD) towards the end of 2001, as a result of the non-accreditation of teacher training programmes offered by the Azaliah College. Modalities were put in place whereby CES and the National Institute for Educational Development (NIED) were commissioned to manage and deliver the in-service teacher education programme in order to accommodate the Azaliah students in the BETD in-service training programme.

In 2003, CES started offering the Post-Graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) in response to a request from the Faculty of Education to accommodate teachers without a teacher's diploma and who cannot attend full-time studies.

An important consideration in the development of these programmes is the fact that UNAM is a national university based in the capital city, at least 700 kilometres from the regions where more than 45% of the population live. If it is to claim to be a truly national university it needs to make and to be seen to make a more significant contribution through improved open learning facilities and courses to the tertiary education of the population as a whole.

The University of Namibia had around 5 352 students in 2002 of which 3 658 were external students, while 56% of the student population is rural and geographically isolated. The distance education student profile indicates that the mean age of the population is 35, while a gender analysis shows that women are over-represented in all study programmes offered by CES, representing 74.5% of the student body (Möwes, 2002).

#### **3.3.4.3 Instructional system**

Printed course materials are central to the study programmes offered by CES and are the main mode of instructional delivery. However, efforts have been made to supplement printed materials by one or more of the following: audio cassettes, video cassettes, weekend tutorials, week-long vacation schools, interactive video conferencing, science practical tutorials and teleconferencing tutorials.

The CES operates through nine regional outreach centres throughout the country, one of which is in Oshakati where the University has opened a new northern campus (see Appendix C). Study materials are sent to regional centres by courier from where they are distributed to, or collected by students. Students in Windhoek either collect their study material from CES or it is mailed to them. Students must submit, regularly, assignments usually based

on study materials for evaluation and tutorial guidance by marker-tutors. Week-long vacation schools in the form of face-to-face tutorials or by means of interactive video conferencing are offered three times a year while regional face-to-face tutorials are organised once a week in various centres throughout a student's study career.

Currently, distance education students doing science courses are expected to attend practical tutorials in Windhoek. However, plans are under way to ensure practical and laboratory facilities at the northern campus in Oshakati and the regional centres through which students will again have the option of either attending vacation school tutorials at the main campus in Windhoek or at the northern campus in Oshakati as well as to attend occasional practical tutorials at local regional centres (Möwes, 2000). These practical tutorial sessions are a compulsory part of the courses in science subjects. As all CES students are practising professionals, CES expects to set up a system of local supervision of set practical implementation activities and to spot-check from the faculties concerned (Möwes and Siaciwena, 2000).

By means of a decentralised student support system through the establishment of nine regional centres, a range of support services are provided, which include:

### ***Tutor-marking***

Marker-tutors are expected to make detailed comments and provide tutorial support when marking assignments. The tutor-marking process is centralised and all the tutor-marking is done at the main campus of the University. Students send their assignments and receive their tutor-marked assignments through the Administration Department of CES. Faculties set requirements and qualifications for marker-tutors (all marker-tutors must be at least graduates preferably with a Master's degree) and appointments are scrutinised by them. CES provides training to marker-tutors for them to acquire the necessary skills in order to provide students with quality tutor-marked assignments.



### ***Telephone-tutoring***

Students are provided with telephone numbers and contact details of their respective marker-tutors and face-to-face tutors for the purpose of contacting them to receive academic guidance. Students mainly contact CES staff at headquarters and at regional centres, marker-tutors and face-to-face tutors, to present their problems and to seek information and clarification on study materials, assignments, fees, library and prescribed books, and tutorial classes. In addition, CES has received audio tele-conferencing equipment from the Commonwealth of Learning. This makes it possible to link students from several centres to a tutor in Windhoek for a simultaneous tutorial. It also makes it possible for regional centres to stage a tutorial in which several students from more outlying areas can be linked by telephone into a tutor-led group in the regional centre.

### ***Face-to-face tutorials***

Face-to-face tutorials are organised locally, at regional centres, with staff appointed and supported from CES headquarters in Windhoek. The current practice is that there should be more than five students registered for a given course of study to justify the offering of face-to-face tutorials and to make it economically viable for CES. These are conducted twice a month on Saturdays in the larger centres, while they are held less frequently but for longer periods in smaller centres and where students are more scattered. At large centres, like the northern campus, groups can be as large as 20 or more, especially for face-to-face tutorials that come close to assignment submission deadlines when students expect to discuss topics related to their assignments. Students are given schedules of face-to-face tutorials and names and contact details of tutors. CES uses its own or rented facilities. In some cases it uses facilities provided free of charge by other institutions such as the teachers' resource centres.

### ***Vacation schools***

These are offered annually in May and August at the University campus in Windhoek and the northern campus in Oshakati. Small group tutorials are organised during these schools to allow for individual attention and discussion

of course content/academic problems. During the August 2000 vacation school, students and tutors were introduced to the use of interactive video-conference tutorials. To this effect, students at the northern campus in Oshakati were exposed to tutorials presented by marker-tutors in Windhoek, while local face-to-face tutors acted as facilitators to encourage participation and discussion, re-phrase and clarify questions and make contributions. In addition, face-to-face tutors were also available to supplement marker-tutors and continue tutorial sessions in case the telephone system broke down and to conduct follow-up local tutorials following on from the interactive video-conference tutorials. The first session was regarded as a remarkable improvement and extension of support services organised by the student support department. In fact, the advent of interactive video at UNAM is seen as an opportunity for this department to extend the use of information and communication technology in order to enhance the teaching and learning environment for both tutors and students.

Vacation schools are organised by CES headquarters in collaboration with the academic coordinator at the northern campus. The Windhoek vacation school is largely staffed by marker-tutors, while that of the northern campus is staffed by the local face-to-face tutors. Accommodation is provided on campus for students attending the Windhoek vacation school.

### ***Training of tutors***

Marker-tutors are briefed once a year by means of consultative workshops on the specific methodology used and instructional skills necessary to tutor distance education students. Aspects of open and distance learning, the profile and nature of CES distance education students, the management and operation of the distance education system and structure in place at CES, as well as various issues regarding student support services necessary for distance education students, are dealt with during tutor-training seminars. Similar sessions are held for face-to-face tutors in the regional centres.

### ***First year orientation/induction***

An initial face-to-face orientation programme is offered for first year students in all programmes as they begin their studies. The purpose is to introduce them both to the courses they will study and to the study methods they will use as external students.

### ***Counselling, individualised tutoring and self-help study groups***

While correspondence tutoring is individual, there is no real possibility of “walk-in” tutorials in most regional centres for reasons of scattered student population and costs. CES is not strong at present in counselling; no special counselling unit exists. Counselling is largely done by the administration department which counsels students on course choices and exemptions, among other things, and by the regional administrative and student support officers.

Study groups are very much at the experimental and initial stage. Students are encouraged to form study groups and CES is supporting any efforts to do so, but these are still very irregular and very varied in their implementation.

### ***E-mail and internet***

Access to e-mail and internet is available to students at the UNAM Windhoek campus, the UNAM Northern campus in Oshakati and all regional centres.

Furthermore, the Government White Paper on Higher Education published in late 1998 suggests the need to coordinate distance education institutions. As a result, consultations started early in 1999 to explore ways whereby the four publicly-funded open and distance learning institutions (Centre for External Studies - University of Namibia; Centre for Open and Lifelong Learning - Polytechnic of Namibia; Namibian College of Open Learning - NAMCOL and the National Institute of Educational Development - NIED) could work together to maximise their effectiveness by increasing collaboration at regional level, especially in the provision of tutorial and student support services. During 2000, the four open and distance learning institutions signed a memorandum of agreement for the establishment of a charitable and educational trust, the

Namibian Open Learning Network (NOLNet). The purpose and rationale of NOLNet is to collaborate and implement a network of open learning centres catering for the needs of distance education students and to manage a series of shared activities such as training, publicity, administrative cooperation, and the production of student guides on effective study skills for distance education students. Through NOLNet, special emphasis is also put on careful monitoring and expansion of information and communication technology and their access to and use by distance education students throughout Namibia. This undoubtedly led to cost-effectiveness, since more technology was available and accessible to permit growth in many different ways (Möwes, 1999). A total of 47 existing libraries and resource centres are currently affiliated to the NOLNet Trust, and distance education students from all partner institutions make use of improved facilities at these centres. Internet facilities are available at about 30 of these centres.

Ensuring that student support mechanisms are satisfactory is expensive and sometimes difficult to achieve. The above account of creating partnerships and forms of networking among similar institutions is regarded as a sound one: synergies are created; economies of scale are achieved; and resources, both human and material, which are usually scarce in a developing country like Namibia, are optimised.

Distance education provision at the University of Namibia is an ambitious attempt to provide adults in full-time employment with a university education and to make opportunities for university education available to many, who for various reasons cannot study on a full-time basis. As has been the case in many African countries, the development of dual-mode institutions is conditioned by a variety of factors. One such factor remains the opposition and scepticism from conventional academics about the possibility to do real academic teaching by distance education. In the case of CES, some of this opposition and scepticism has been based on the justifiable opinion of the quality of traditional correspondence education, inherited from UNISA. However, with the advantage of the strong, very experienced and respected leadership of its former Director, which is of crucial importance to the success

of a distance education programme within a dual-mode system, the Centre for External Studies has undergone rapid transformation and has grown to a professional Centre, that has distanced itself radically from the widespread system of correspondence teaching.

### **3.3.5 A synthesis of teaching and learning models in distance education**

Whether a university is planned and developed from the very start exclusively for distance education (single mode), or whether a traditional university also provides distance education (dual mode), these are operating modes that are in general decided upon through the criteria being set in educational policies and planning, higher educational or institutional and professional policies, and logistics. These operating modes, described and commented on in the preceding paragraphs, represent institutional structures with which different forms of learning and teaching are made possible and supported.

Each of the above distance education universities has its own unmistakable character, which cannot be completely evaluated without a thorough knowledge of the situation in the respective country. They do in fact have something in common, because fundamentally they have to solve the same problems, although an analysis brings to the fore different models of teaching and learning in distance education. These models are:

- correspondence studies, which are in principle based on study guides, textbooks and other academic literature and comments on assignments;
- the classical distance education in a multimedia system in which several components of printed material, television, radio, audiovisual media, tutorial support in study centres, and residential schools, are carefully developed and coordinated with one another; and
- research-based distance education, which is provided under the unity of research and teaching and is composed of reading printed distance education courses, optional support from mentors in study centres, in part obligatory attendance at seminars given by professors, and a system of written and oral examinations.

Analyses and review of these models reveal characteristic differences that lead to flexible and variable teaching and learning in distance education. It has been introduced both in advanced industrial countries and in developing countries, while forms of teaching and learning are constantly being created that are adapted to the respective situation.

In particular, all the above universities pursue the aim of being able to support more students than there are places available in conventional universities, though the United Kingdom's Open University refuses in principle to admit students who have just completed their secondary education because the university is oriented towards mature students. The humanitarian motive of contributing to equality of opportunity is perceived everywhere, though the emphasis given, differs.

The University of South Africa regards printed material as the main medium and supplements this basically by means of correspondence between lecturers and students, and because of this, the model is referred to as first-generation distance education (correspondence study).

The United Kingdom's Open University, on the other hand, is the prototype of multimedia distance education with an impetus on social reform and the establishment of a special system of adult education. This implies a different and special type of teaching and learning. When a team of experts at the UKOU spends 12-18 months developing a course that is tailored with great care and effort to the special learning requirements of distance education students, this is a completely different kind of teaching to simply transmitting conventional teaching.

Similarly, every effort is taken at the FernUniversität in development work over the same period, to make teaching texts for students self-instructional and to coordinate them with presentations in the study centres. This creates the foundations for a type of learning that is oriented towards distance education

and that is completely different from simply learning from textbooks and using a syllabus.

### **3.4 SUMMARY**

In this chapter, key issues related to the development and management of student support services have been highlighted.

Furthermore, attention has been given to perspectives on teaching and learning models in open and distance learning as well as to institutional arrangements for the provision of student support services. The discussion focused on the redefinition of the concept of student support services from a marginal and supplementary service to an integral role in the instructional package as a result of the change in the needs of the students, curriculum changes and the advent of multimedia systems. These changes have resulted in a move towards student-centred learning, promoting the intellectual development of the distance education student through continuous interaction and students' active participation in the learning process.

Up to now, both the management and delivery of open and distance learning and the motivation for the provision of effective student support services have been discussed in detail. Chapter four will give a detailed description of the research design and methodology.

**CHAPTER 4****RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY****4.1 INTRODUCTION**

In this chapter the focus will be on the research design and methodology used in this study. The researcher will explain and describe the aim of the study, the data collection methods, data analysis, ethical considerations, delimitation and limitations to the study.

**4.2 RESEARCH DESIGN**

Perceptions of the qualitative versus the quantitative research paradigms range from assertions that the two approaches are incompatible and in direct conflict (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) to the more moderate position that each paradigm is best suited to certain research questions and that in many cases a combination of the two approaches is superior to either (Reichardt and Cook, 1979). It is the conviction of the researcher that for the purpose of this study, a combination of quantitative and qualitative methodologies had to be used in order to follow a suitable research plan and to gather the necessary data that would answer the research questions of this study. Quantitative data provided basic research evidence, while qualitative data were used to round off the picture and to provide examples and reasons behind the quantitative findings. Furthermore, both positivist and interpretive research suited this study, since objective facts as well as the meanings students attach to such facts were crucial for the purpose of this study.



#### **4.2.1 Quantitative paradigm**

Different researchers make different epistemological assumptions about the nature of causality, and these assumptions affect their approach to the study of cause-and-effect relationships among educational phenomena. For example, the purpose of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of the current student support system from the perspective of the student. Specifically, emphasis was placed on measures to determine which student support services have been the most effective and which should be improved, thus, to explore the relationship between the current effectiveness of provision of student support services and students' expectations and needs with regard to student support services. In this study, students' expectations and needs were viewed somewhat like matter (i.e. a real social object) that can be affected by the force of another matter (effective student support services). This view of causation permeates positivist research in the social sciences.

Hutchinson (1988:124) states that "positivists view the world as being 'out there' and available for study in a more or less static form". Gall, Borg and Gall (1996:18) define positivism as the epistemological doctrine that physical and social reality is independent of those who observe it, and that observations of this reality, if unbiased, constitute scientific knowledge. Thus, social reality is not constructed or interpreted by individuals who participate in it, as is the assumption under postpositivism.

Another assumption applicable to positivist epistemology is that researchers believe that features of the social environment retain a high degree of constancy across time and space. Furthermore, positivist researchers study samples and population and statistical techniques are available to determine the likelihood that sample findings apply to the population.

The current study lends itself to all the above assumptions and the study also includes the selection of a population and a sample, the collection of numerical

data and then subjecting the data to numerical analysis, using statistical procedures. The study is therefore based on the philosophy of a positivist research design.

Quantitative research is virtually synonymous with positivist research (Gall, Borg and Gall, 1996) and the researcher thus used a quantitative approach and focused on the causal-comparative method, which is also referred to as ex post facto research (Gall, Borg and Gall, 1996), because causes are studied after they presumably have exerted their effect on another variable. Cohen and Manion (1994) cite Kerlinger (1986), who defined ex post facto research more formally as that in which the independent variable has already occurred and in which the researcher starts with the observation of a dependent variable. She then studies the independent variable in retrospect for its possible relationship to, and effect on, the dependent variable.

The researcher has identified this method as appropriate for the study, since the independent variable (student support services) cannot be directly manipulated by the investigator, because their manifestations have already happened. This particular research design has also been chosen because this study searched to establish the existence of certain relationships and effects among variables under investigation, that is, student support services and expectations and needs of distance education students.

Furthermore, this design was considered applicable to this study because its use in research has been supported in most literature on research methods. For example, Ary, Jacobs and Razavie (1972:269), in supporting the use of ex post facto design, stated that:

*Though not a perfect substitute for experimentation, it does provide recognition of the circumstances under which much educational research must be conducted...It remains a*

*useful method that can supply much information of value in educational decision-making.*

Similarly, Kerlinger (1986:359) has supported the use of ex post facto design:

*Despite the weakness, much ex post facto research must be done in psychology, sociology and education simply because many research problems in the social sciences and education do not lend themselves to experimental enquiry. A little reflection on some of the important variables in educational research ... intelligence, aptitude, aspirations, home background, parental upbringing, teacher personality, school atmosphere, ... will show that they are non-manipulable ... It can even be said that ex post facto research is more important than experimental research ... (by this is meant) that the most important social scientific and educational research problems do not lend themselves to experimentation, although many of them do lend themselves to controlled inquiry of the ex post facto kind.*

#### **4.2.2 Qualitative paradigm**

The reality to be studied, namely which student support services have been the most effective and which should be improved, should include a student's subjective experiences. This is a characteristic of the interpretive paradigm, which aims to explain the subjective reasons and meanings that lie behind the student's interaction with various student support services. The basic assumptions guiding the interpretive paradigm are that knowledge is socially constructed by people active in the research process, and that researchers should attempt to understand the "complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it" (Mertens, 1998:11). Consequently, by adopting this assumption of the interpretive paradigm, the researcher looked beyond quantitative information that makes the evidence believable.

### **4.3 METHODOLOGY**

#### **4.3.1 Sampling and population**

The population for this study was made up of adult distance education students from the Ondangwa East and West educational regions in which the northern campus of the University of Namibia is situated. These students are enrolled for a Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) degree through the Centre for External Studies at the University of Namibia. As discussed in chapter one, a random sample of subjects was drawn from the defined population. Random selected samples have the advantage that they yield research data that can be generalised to a larger population (Gall, Borg and Gall, 1996). Both second- and third-year students were included in the study.

Twenty percent of the population, which amounts to 110 subjects, were randomly selected from this region. Ideally, the researcher should have included B.Ed. students from all regions in the country in this study for the findings to be properly generalised to the entire population of B.Ed., Centre for External Studies students in Namibia. However, this was not possible because of the nature of the study. The nature of the study did not permit the use of other regions, since not all student support services provided at the northern campus are provided at the other regional centres in the country. A single regional centre was used to ensure that respondents were subjected to a similar student support environment so as to rule out the effects of extraneous variables in their evaluation of student support services in relation to their expectations and needs.

#### **4.3.2 Design of the research instruments**

As stated in chapter one, the research design incorporates both a quantitative (positivist paradigm) and a qualitative (interpretative paradigm) dimension. Consequently, a combination of a questionnaire and open-ended questions was used for data collection. Relevant data were collected through a structured

questionnaire (see Appendix B) made up of scaled, checklist, and “yes” and “no” questions.

Qualitative data were collected through 11 open-ended questions (see Appendix B, Section D). These open-ended questions were used to obtain data supplementary to that obtained by items from the questionnaire. In addition, the open-ended questions were administered to establish whether students’ expectations and needs had been met and whether they were satisfied with the provision of student support services.

Prior to the construction of the research instrument, the researcher reviewed the literature and examined a variety of research instruments to determine whether there were existing instruments that could be used to gather the necessary information for this study. However, the review of existing instruments did not uncover appropriate instruments that could be adopted for this study. The reviewed instruments were either constructed to evaluate one type of support service or they were designed for distance education students in a different cultural setting. Consequently, the researcher found it necessary to design her own instruments to suit the present study. In developing the instruments, the following procedure was followed:

- existing instruments were reviewed; and
- a preliminary list of items was developed in conformity with the research questions.

The content of the questionnaire was developed from related literature, especially studies where similar information was solicited. The questionnaire was divided into three sections. The first section elicited general background information, while the second part inquired about access to and attendance rates of student support services. The third section of the instrument set several evaluation items for each type of student support service being provided.

Students evaluated the various student support services in terms of their expectations and needs for such services.

#### **4.3.2.1 Refinement of the research instruments**

The instruments were discussed with the supervisor and some of the researcher's colleagues offered valuable suggestions for improving some of the items proposed in the instruments.

#### **4.3.2.2 Pilot testing of the research instruments**

The researcher conducted a pilot study among a group of 10 practising teachers in the Ondangwa East and West educational regions, enrolled for the B.Ed. degree. Written consent was obtained from the directors of these educational regions (Appendix A). Teachers involved in the pilot testing were informed of the rationale for the study. They participated voluntarily and informed consent was gained. Pilot testing did not disrupt the normal teaching responsibilities and functioning of the school.

A pilot study was necessary in this investigation as a pre-test of the research instruments. The pilot study was administered to determine whether:

- there were ambiguities in any of the items;
- the instruments would elicit the type of data anticipated by the researcher; and
- the type of data obtained could be meaningfully analysed in relation to the stated research questions.

#### **4.3.2.3 Results of the pilot testing**

Results of the pilot study showed that the instruments were valid for the present study and that most of the items were understood as intended by the researcher.

However, the pilot study revealed that there was evidence in the semi-structured interview suggesting that Section A was a repetition of data gathered through the

questionnaire. The semi-structured interview was therefore reduced to include one section only, in order to elicit respondents' overall opinion and evaluation of the quality of student support services provided by the Centre for External Studies at the northern campus of the University of Namibia.

The pilot study further revealed that Section B, question 7, confused some respondents, because it was a repetition of question 6 and prompted the same response. It was furthermore evident that Section B, question 13, was redundant and had already been covered through previous questions.

Finally, there was evidence that items on “face-to-face tutorials” lacked clarity, since the researcher had to explain the meaning of this concept to several respondents. Students referred to this service as “Saturday classes”. In order to achieve both clarity and simplicity of meaning, the aforementioned item was reformulated and reads “face-to-face/Saturday tutorials”, while “ODL students” was replaced with “distance education students”. The experience of the researcher in this regard is summarised by Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Lowe (2002:133) who point out that:

*Your questions need to be clearly phrased, so that the interviewee can understand them. Questions should also avoid too many theoretical concepts or jargon, since your understanding of such terms may vary from that of your interviewees. Where theoretical concepts or specific terminology need to be used, you will have to ensure that the interviewee understands your intended meaning.*

Conducting interviews during the pilot study was a costly process where it was necessary to travel to 10 different schools, situated several kilometres from one another in rural areas with poor infrastructure and roads. Since the purpose of the interview is to explore themes and explain findings elicited through the questionnaire, the process was time-consuming. The planned time required to

obtain data was not less than two hours per respondent, but the real time mostly exceeded this, taking two hours or longer. This may have had an adverse impact on the number and representativeness of those who were willing to be interviewed. In order to consider and take care of logistical and resource issues, the researcher had to re-examine the feasibility of the study.

The aforementioned factors were considered in the scheduling of semi-structured interviews and the researcher revised the procedure by combining the questionnaire and interview schedule. The 11 open-ended questions from the semi-structured interview were made part of the questionnaire to give respondents the opportunity to raise issues and concerns not covered by the scales in the first three sections of the questionnaire. The main study was then carried out at one establishment, since it was more practical and less time-consuming.

#### **4.3.3 Data collection procedure**

After pilot testing and adapting the research instrument, it was self-administered to each member in the sample to ensure a high response rate. The data collection was carried out during the September 2003 vacation school scheduled at the northern campus. An announcement was made during the welcome and opening of the vacation school to inform students about the rationale of the study and to invite the students, chosen through random sampling, to take part in the study. Senior students (second- and third-year students) participated in the study after informed consent was gained. In each instance, the purpose of the study and the manner in which students had to respond was described. In order to explore the students' concerns and wishes with regard to the quality of student support services provided at the northern campus, the 11 open-ended questions were posed to the group. The validity of the open-ended questions was checked by means of summarising what the respondents had written to each question and asked them to confirm that I had understood.



#### 4.3.4 Data analysis

Data were prepared for computer entry, cleaning and processing, using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

The independent variable for the study was student support services, which included administrative support, orientation seminars, vacation schools/interactive video-conference tutorials, telephone tutoring, face-to-face tutoring/Saturday classes, and tutor-marking.

The dependent variable was students' expectations and needs with regard to student support services. In view of the independent variable, dependent variable and the questionnaire, the main test statistic appropriate for the study was a non-parametric test, namely the chi-square test ( $\chi^2$ ). The chi-square test is a measure of how closely the observed distribution approximates the expected distribution, and it is effective when testing goodness-of-fit where nominal variables are categorised in two or more ways (Gall, Borg and Gall, 1996). Whether there would be significant relationships and/or differences between demographic variables and students' access to and evaluation of student support services was determined, using the chi-square test.

The researcher also used descriptive analyses, frequencies and percentages to compare the proportions of subjects who responded in different directions.

The data analysis for the 11 open-ended questions involved a process of constant comparison, whereby each response was compared to the previous, enabling the researcher to develop a set of broad categories. In order to reduce the categories, they were reviewed for overlap, resulting in some categories being eliminated, while others were merged. From this process, categories emerged which were representative of all respondents' experiences.

## 4.4 CONSIDERATIONS REGARDING THE STUDY

Ethical considerations, delimitations and limitations were taken into consideration for this study.

### 4.4.1 Ethical considerations

According to Mouton (2001:243), ethical choices involve a compromise between the interests and rights of different parties. He further argues that scientists have the right to the search for truth, but not at the expense of the right of other individuals in society:

*Scientific research invariably involves studying other beings in some form or another. Science cannot proceed without the participation of human and animal subjects. But all subjects have basic rights. Where research involves the acquisition of material and information provided on the basis of mutual trust, it is essential that the rights, interests and sensitivities of those studies must be protected.*

In this regard, the researcher respected the respondents' right to anonymity and privacy by ensuring that their informed consent was gained. The researcher informed each respondent about the background and purpose of the study and explicitly promised confidentiality of information. The researcher did the data analysis and no other research assistant or anyone else had access to the information given by the respondents. To further maintain and ensure the anonymity of the respondents, no identifiable indicators were used in the study.

### 4.4.2 Delimitations

The study was confined to two educational regions in Namibia, which represent one regional centre (northern campus) of the Centre for External Studies.

#### **4.4.3 Limitations**

Ideally, the researcher should have included all B.Ed. students from all regions registered through the Centre for External Studies, for the findings to be generalised to the entire population of B.Ed. distance education students. However, this was not possible, because of the nature of the study. The nature of the study did not permit the use of other regions, since not all support services provided at the northern campus were provided at the other regional centres in the country.

Another limitation in this study concerns students' choice of making use of student support services. It may have occurred that even though some students did not make use of student support services, their academic performance may not have been influenced as such. This may have had an effect on the results of this study.

Lastly, this study had to be completed within a certain time limit, which curtailed the extent to which the study could otherwise have been stretched.

#### **4.5 SUMMARY**

This chapter provided a detailed description of the research, the strategies used by the researcher and the research design. The researcher also described the methods used to collect and analyse the data. A brief discussion on ethical considerations was included as this was taken into account throughout the study. Finally, the delimitations and limitations that could have influenced the findings of the study were discussed briefly.

In the next chapter the researcher includes a descriptive summary and analysis of the results.

**CHAPTER 5**

## **PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF THE FINDINGS OF THE STUDY**

### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

The aim of this study was to evaluate the provision of student support services in open and distance learning at the University of Namibia's Centre for External Studies from a student perspective. In order to understand the needs of adult distance education students and to determine whether the current student support system at the Centre for External Studies contributes to the provision of quality higher education, it is necessary to balance the foregoing literature review and student support models against an empirical investigation, carried out in the specific context of higher education in Namibia, provided through open and distance learning. What has been of concern throughout this study is the fact that there is hardly any empirical research on student support in open and distance learning as it pertains to Namibia. The results of this research are seen as only the initial steps towards explaining the need and importance of student support services for the facilitation of effective learning and for the provision of and contribution towards quality distance education at tertiary level.

### **5.2 FINDINGS OF THE STUDY**

Due to the fact that the researcher administered the research instrument and waited on respondents to complete the various sections of the questionnaire, the response rate was 50% (55 respondents).

In order to present the results of this study in as logical a fashion as possible, it was necessary firstly, to refer to the demographic details; secondly, to report on the access to and attendance of student support services; thirdly, to share the findings on the students' evaluation of student support services; fourthly, to examine the relationships and differences between demographic variables and students' access to and evaluation of student support services; and finally, to report on the open-ended questions. Tables have been used in most instances for clarity, ease of understanding and interpretation.

### **5.2.1 Demographic details of students**

Table 5.1 to 5.8 provide the frequency and percentage frequency of the demographic variables of the students who responded to the questionnaire. The results were consistent with results reflected in annual reports on student statistics for the Centre for External Studies (Centre for External Studies, 1997 and 1998).

While it is obvious that each distance education student has a profile which may be similar to or different from that of others, there is no evidence to indicate that distance education students should be regarded as a homogeneous group. However, Gibson (1998:10) indicated that:

*...distance learners do share broad demographic and situational similarities that have often provided the basis for profiles of the 'typical' distance learner in higher education.*

In addition, distance education students may also have different prior learning experiences, different learning styles and preferences and coping strategies. These differences are important and must be addressed to meet students' diverse needs, and to improve their educational experience.

All these together show that one is dealing with a type of student who differs in several ways from the norm of those attending campus-based university and that their gender, age, greater experience of life and employment, their different motivational situation, and their multiple roles should be taken into account to develop a learning and teaching programme tailored to their special needs. As such, the researcher regarded it as imperative to solicit information from the respondents on these demographic variables. Variables will be discussed in the order of appearance in the questionnaire (Appendix B).

#### **5.2.1.1 Gender**

Respondents included in the study had to be of both gender groups. It was, however, not possible to obtain an equal number of males and females. The distance education system of the University of Namibia is making a significant contribution to the elimination of the problem of gender inequality in higher education (Möwes and Siaciwena, 2000) and is probably unique in that it has more female than male students in all its study programmes. Table 5.1 shows that 88.9% of the respondents were female students, while 11.1% were male, which is a normal representation of the gender distribution for external students at the University of Namibia.

#### **5.2.1.2 Age**

The most effective way to measure respondents' opinions according to age was to put them in categories of 4-5 year intervals. Responses to this question follow in table 5.1.

**TABLE 5.1**  
**GENDER BY AGE**

AGE CATEGORY	MALE		FEMALE		TOTAL	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
17-22	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
23-27	0	0.0	4	7.4	4	7.4
28-33	2	3.7	16	29.6	18	33.3
34-39	3	5.6	13	24.0	16	29.6
40-45	0	0.0	12	22.2	12	22.2
46-50	1	1.85	1	1.85	2	3.7
Older than 50	0	0.0	2	3.7	2	3.7
<b>TOTAL</b>	6	11.1	48	88.9	54	100.0

From table 5.1 it is clear that this was a middle-aged population with the majority (62.9%) of respondents between 28 and 39 and 22.2% between 40-45. This is a normal representation of the average age of CES students, which is 35 (Möwes, 2002). The results further confirm the common belief that the majority of students over the age of 40 are women.

#### **5.2.1.3 Marital status and employment**

As most adult distance education students study part-time and need to balance a range of responsibilities, conflicting commitments is a frequently cited problem. In many instances, study will necessarily assume a lower priority than family and work commitments, particularly when unforeseen events intervene (Bird and Morgan, 2003). Möwes (2002) similarly found that students considered that their families, jobs and other commitments exerted a significant influence on the number of study hours available as well as on the conditions under which they study. Marital and employment status have a great influence on students' access to student support services. Table 5.2 shows that more than half (60%) of the

respondents reported that they were married, while the majority (96.4%) were employed as reflected in table 5.3.

**TABLE 5.2**  
**MARITAL STATUS**

CATEGORY	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Single	21	38.2
Married	33	60.0
Widowed	1	1.8
TOTAL	55	100.0

**TABLE 5.3**  
**EMPLOYMENT STATUS**

CATEGORY	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Employed	53	96.4
Not employed	1	1.8
No response	1	1.8
TOTAL	55	100.0

#### **5.2.1.4 Resources directly related to access to student support services**

Resources directly related to access to student support services include access to information and communication technology (ICT), such as telephone, television, radio, audio-cassette recorder, video-cassette recorder, computer and internet and/or e-mail; distance to the nearest post office and northern campus; and transport to the northern campus. Tables 5.4-5.8 present the frequency distribution by the respondents on resources directly related to access to student support services.



**TABLE 5.4**  
**RESOURCES DIRECTLY RELATED TO ACCESS TO STUDENT SUPPORT**  
**SERVICES**

CATEGORY	YES		NO		TOTAL	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Access to telephone	43	78.2	12	21.8	55	100.0
Access to making calls at work	13	23.6	42	76.4	55	100.0
Access to receiving calls at work	12	21.8	43	78.2	55	100.0

Table 5.4 shows that 78.2% of the respondents reported that they either own a telephone or have access to a telephone, while the majority of students (77.3%) could not make or receive telephone calls at work.

**TABLE 5.5**  
**RESOURCES DIRECTLY RELATED TO ACCESS TO STUDENT**  
**SUPPORT SERVICES**

CATEGORY	YES		NO		TOTAL	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Own a television	28	50.9	27	49.1	55	100.0
Own a radio	44	80.0	11	20.0	55	100.0
Own an audio-cassette recorder	8	14.5	47	85.5	55	100.0
Own a video-cassette recorder	11	20.0	44	80.0	55	100.0

Table 5.5 shows that half (50.9%) of the respondents indicated that they owned a television, while 80% reported that they owned a radio. More than 80% of the respondents did not own either an audio-cassette or video-cassette recorder.

**TABLE 5.6**  
**RESOURCES DIRECTLY RELATED TO ACCESS TO STUDENT**  
**SUPPORT SERVICES**

CATEGORY	YES		NO		TOTAL	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>Own a computer</b>	2	3.6	53	96.4	55	100.0
<b>Access to internet and/or e-mail</b>	0	0.0	55	100.0	55	100.0

The majority (96.4%) of the respondents reported that they did not own a computer, while all respondents did not have access to internet and/or e-mail facilities as summarised in table 5.6

**TABLE 5.7**  
**RESOURCES DIRECTLY RELATED TO ACCESS TO STUDENT SUPPORT**  
**SERVICES**

CATEGORY	0-20km		21-40km		41-60km		61-80km		81-100km		More than 100km		TOTAL	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>Distance from nearest post office</b>	24	43.6	12	21.8	9	16.4	3	5.5	3	5.5	4	7.3	55	100.0
<b>Distance from northern campus</b>	10	18.2	9	16.4	8	14.5	8	14.5	12	21.8	8	14.5	55	100.0

**TABLE 5.8**  
**RESOURCES DIRECTLY RELATED TO ACCESS TO STUDENT**  
**SUPPORT SERVICES**

TRANSPORT TO NORTHERN CAMPUS	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Own car	12	21.8
Taxi	34	61.8
Hitch-hike	9	16.4
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>100.0</b>

The potential for isolation in open and distance learning is a well-documented phenomenon and may be both a geographical and psychological construct. The ability of today's distance education student to become part of a learning community and to establish satisfactory contact with administrative and academic staff is one of the major afflictions of life as an external student. Inability to obtain timely, practical input or feedback due to geographical constraints may be dispiriting and is a commonly cited reason for discontinuance (Parr, 1996 and Brown, 1996).

The responses on distance from campus and transport to campus are analysed in tables 5.7 and 5.8 and show that half of the respondents (50.8%) live more than 60km from the northern campus, while 61.8% of them make use of taxis to travel to the campus.

### **5.2.2 Access to and attendance of student support services**

Answers to this question were obtained from an analysis of the students' responses on access to and attendance of 14 student support services in Section B of the questionnaire. Students were asked to respond in terms of a four-point rating scale ranging from never (1) to very often (4).

The services covered both administrative and academic student support services available at the northern campus, namely study facilities; library facilities; photocopying facilities; access to computers, internet, e-mail; audio/video facilities; study groups; counselling; orientation for new students; vacation schools; face-to-face/Saturday tutorials; telephone tutorials and interactive video conference tutorials. Table 5.9 presents the frequency distribution by the respondents on access to and attendance of student support services.

**TABLE 5.9**  
**ACCESS TO AND ATTENDANCE OF STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES**

SUPPORT SERVICE	ATTENDANCE									
	Never		Seldom		Often		Very often		TOTAL	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1. Study facilities	3	5.5	20	36.4	19	34.5	7	12.7	55	100.0
2. Library facilities	6	10.9	16	29.1	17	30.9	15	27.3	55	100.0
3. Photocopying facilities	3	5.5	11	20.0	21	38.2	18	32.7	55	100.0
4. Access to computers	41	74.5	1	1.8	8	14.5	2	3.6	55	100.0
5. Access to internet	44	80.0	3	5.5	3	5.5	0	0.0	55	100.0
6. Access to e-mail	43	78.2	0	0.0	3	5.5	3	5.5	55	100.0
7. Audio/video facilities	24	43.6	8	14.5	3	5.5	5	9.1	55	100.0
8. Study groups	6	10.9	10	18.2	17	30.9	17	30.9	55	100.0
9. Developmental counselling	26	47.3	11	20.0	9	16.4	4	7.3	55	100.0
10. Orientation for new students	11	20.0	15	27.3	14	25.5	9	16.4	55	100.0
11. Vacation schools	0	0.0	10	18.2	18	32.7	26	47.3	55	100.0
12. Face-to-face/Saturday tutorials	3	5.5	17	30.9	14	25.5	16	29.1	55	100.0
13. Telephone tutoring	39	70.9	5	9.1	3	5.5	3	5.5	55	100.0
14. Interactive video tutorials	10	18.2	12	21.8	26	47.3	3	5.5	55	100.0

### **5.2.2.1 Use of study and library facilities**

The results concerning use of study and library facilities at the northern campus show that more than half of the respondents (52.7%) often make use of this support service.

### **5.2.2.2 Use of computers, internet and e-mail services**

The use of computers, internet and e-mail services yielded results indicating that almost 80% of the subjects did not make use of modern information and communication technology. This result corresponds with the results in table 5.6, which indicates that the majority of students do not own or have regular access to a computer and internet or e-mail services. Moreover, when asked for reasons why they did not make use of these support services, 80% (table 5.10) of the respondents reported that they did not know how to use computer, internet and e-mail services, while some of the students also indicated that they did not know they had access or that they stayed too far from the campus to have access to these services.

**TABLE 5.10**  
**REASONS FOR NOT MAKING USE OF COMPUTER, INTERNET AND**  
**E-MAIL SERVICES**

REASON	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Don't know how to use it	44	80.0
Not aware that I have access	1	1.8
Stay too far from campus to have access to ICT	1	1.8
Not applicable	4	7.3
No response	5	9.1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>100.0</b>

### **5.2.2.3 Use of developmental counselling**

Of the subjects, 47.3% reported that they did not make use of counselling services, compared to 23.7% who often made use of them. Table 5.11 presents

the results on students' reasons for not making use of counselling services and shows that students are generally not satisfied with the provision of this service.

**TABLE 5.11**  
**REASONS FOR NOT MAKING USE OF DEVELOPMENTAL**  
**COUNSELLING**

REASON	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Don't know who is responsible for this service	6	10.9
Not aware of such a service	5	9.1
Service is poor, rather want to drop out	3	5.5
Staff do not have time to attend to us	3	5.5
Staff do not have answers to our questions	1	1.8
No need for counselling	2	3.6
Not applicable	25	45.5
No response	10	18.2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>100.0</b>

#### **5.2.2.4 Attendance of orientation for new students**

The results indicate that 41.9% of the respondents often attended orientation seminars for new or first-year students. Reasons cited for not attending orientation seminars include "had not been invited" (5.5%) and "not aware of such a service" (3.6%).

#### **5.2.2.5 Use of study groups**

The analysis in table 5.9 shows that 61.8% of the respondents often made use of study groups. Peer-to-peer interaction in the form of study groups appears to be a promising source of timely and cost-effective student support, though little empirical evidence has been presented. The tutor does not always have to be the primary source of all student support. This result is evidence of the valuable substitute peer-to-peer support can be to the formal support most universities are able to provide.

### 5.2.2.6 Attendance of face-to-face tutorials and vacation schools

Concerning the opportunities provided for face-to-face tutorials between students and tutors, the majority of respondents indicated that they attended vacation schools, face-to-face tutorials and interactive video-conference tutorials. Results summarised in table 5.9 reflect that 80% often attended vacation schools, while only 18.2% attended seldom. In addition, 54.6% often attended face-to-face/Saturday tutorials, while 52.8% often attended interactive video-conference tutorials.

### 5.2.2.7 Use of telephone-tutoring

Of the respondents, 70.9% never attended telephone tutorials or used the telephone to contact their tutors. Though 78.2% of the respondents had access to telephones, many students reported that they did not make use of this support services for reasons summarised in table 5.12.

**TABLE 5.12**  
**REASONS FOR NOT MAKING USE OF TELEPHONE TUTORIALS**

REASON	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
No contact details/names on assignments provided	10	18.2
No need to phone tutors	1	1.8
No access to a phone	3	5.5
Not aware of such a service	9	16.4
Tutors are not available and do not return voice-mail messages	5	9.1
Too expensive	2	3.6
Tutors not willing to help	1	1.8
Not applicable	10	18.2
No response	14	25.5
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>100.0</b>

### **5.2.3 Evaluation of student support services**

Answers to this question were obtained from an analysis of the students' responses to statements in Section C of the questionnaire. Students were asked to respond in terms of a four-point rating scale ranging from strongly agree (1) to strongly disagree (4).

The statements covered several aspects relevant to the quality of various student support services available to distance education students enrolled at the northern campus of the University of Namibia. These statements were grouped into six categories of student support services, namely administrative support, orientation, vacation schools/interactive video-conference tutorials, telephone tutorials, face-to-face/Saturday tutorials and tutor-marking. Most of the respondents reflected their rating on the evaluation of student support services by either agreeing or disagreeing with the statements. Very few respondents indicated their rating on the evaluation of student support services by either strongly agreeing or strongly disagreeing with the statements. Frequencies were therefore condensed into a two-point scale to indicate whether respondents agreed or disagreed with each statement.

#### **5.2.3.1 Evaluation of administrative support services**

The results concerning agreement or disagreement on the statements about administrative support are summarised in table 5.13.



**TABLE 5.13**  
**EVALUATION OF ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT SERVICES**

STATEMENT	EXTENT OF AGREEMENT/DISAGREEMENT WITH STATEMENT					
	Agree		Disagree		No response	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
1. Adequate and timely support available on admission and registration	40	72.7	13	23.7	2	3.6
2. Adequate and timely support available on programmes and courses	39	70.9	13	23.7	3	5.5
3. Adequate and timely support on course exemptions and amendments	30	54.5	19	34.5	6	10.9
4. Queries are directed to appropriate UNAM staff	35	63.6	15	27.3	5	9.1
5. Adequate and timely support to facilitate contact between students and staff	27	49.1	25	45.4	3	5.5
6. Adequate and timely support on issuing and purchasing of course material	31	56.4	20	36.4	4	7.3
7. Adequate and timely support available on developmental counselling	28	50.9	24	43.6	3	5.5
8. Guidance and assistance available on access and use of ICT	10	18.2	42	76.4	3	5.5
9. Assistance available on study and library facilities	37	67.3	15	27.3	3	5.5
10. Adequate support available to facilitate and form study groups	26	47.3	25	45.4	4	7.3
11. Adequate and timely support available on information regarding vacation schools	33	60.0	17	30.9	5	9.1
12. Adequate and timely support available on scheduling of face-to-face tutorials	35	63.9	16	29.1	4	7.3
13. Adequate and timely support available on telephone tutoring	16	29.1	37	67.2	2	3.6

The results of the evaluation of administrative support services indicate that overall, more than half of the students were satisfied and agreed that adequate and timely administrative support is provided.

However, respondents were particularly in disagreement with the following statements: adequate and timely support to facilitate contact between students and staff (45.4%); adequate and timely support available on developmental counselling (43.6%); guidance and assistance available on access and use of ICT (76.4%); adequate and timely support available on telephone tutoring (67.2%); and adequate and timely support available to facilitate and form study groups (45.4%). Between 2-6 respondents were undecided and did not respond to some of the questions.

#### **5.2.3.2 Evaluation of orientation seminars for new students**

There were seven statements in this section. The results are summarised in table 5.14. Considering the trend of all the responses, it seems as if the respondents were inclined to agree on all statements, except one.

**TABLE 5.14**  
**EVALUATION OF ORIENTATION SEMINARS FOR NEW STUDENTS**

STATEMENT	EXTENT OF AGREEMENT/DISAGREEMENT WITH STATEMENT							
	Agree		Disagree		Not applicable		No response	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1. Orientation seminar prepared you to be ready to start with your studies	36	65.4	3	5.5	14	25.5	2	3.6
2. Orientation seminar prepared you for your role as a distance education student	36	65.4	3	5.5	14	25.5	2	3.6
3. Orientation seminar made you aware of what is expected from you as distance education student to be successful in your studies	35	63.6	4	7.2	14	25.5	2	3.6
4. Orientation seminar made you aware of all the support services available on campus	26	47.3	13	23.7	14	25.5	2	3.6
5. Orientation seminar prepared you to be more familiar with what studying through distance education mode entails	32	58.2	7	12.7	14	25.5	2	3.6
6. Orientation seminar was useful to clarify doubts and problems pertaining to your study programme	29	52.8	9	16.3	14	25.5	3	5.5
7. Orientation seminar motivated and encouraged you to make a success of your studies	33	60.0	6	10.9	14	25.5	2	3.6

The statements on orientation seminars for new students yielded results indicating that respondents agreed in general about the effectiveness of this student support service, indicating a positive evaluation. However, respondents expressed their frustration about the lack of awareness of student support services and only 47.3% of the respondents agreed that the orientation seminar made them aware of all the student support services available at the northern campus. Fourteen (25.5%) of the respondents did not attend an orientation seminar and could not, as a result, evaluate this support service, while 2-3 students were undecided and did not respond to some of the questions.

#### **5.2.3.3 *Evaluation of vacation schools and interactive video-conference tutorials***

The results concerning agreement or disagreement on the 13 statements about vacation schools and interactive video-conference tutorials are summarised in table 5.15.

**TABLE 5.15**  
**EVALUATION OF VACATION SCHOOLS AND INTERACTIVE**  
**VIDEO-CONFERENCE TUTORIALS**

STATEMENT	EXTENT OF AGREEMENT/DISAGREEMENT WITH STATEMENT							
	Agree		Disagree		Not applicable		No response	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1. Scheduling of vacation schools/interactive video-conference tutorials suits your personal schedule	38	69.0	12	21.8	2	3.6	3	5.5
2. The tutor shows sound knowledge of his/her subject matter	46	83.6	6	10.9	2	3.6	1	1.8
3. Presentation of the subject matter is systematic, clear and effective	42	76.3	11	20.0	2	3.6	0	0.0
4. A variety of teaching methods and visual aids are used to make the course interesting, easy to follow and rewarding	34	61.8	19	34.5	2	3.6	0	0.0
5. The overall attendance and punctuality of the tutor during the vacation school/interactive video-conference tutorials is good	29	52.7	24	43.7	2	3.6	0	0.0
6. The tutor encourages students to share their experiences/ knowledge	46	83.7	7	12.8	2	3.6	0	0.0
7. The tutor encourages questions and dialogue with the students	48	87.3	3	5.5	2	3.6	2	3.6
8. The tutor is available to render additional consultation and academic support outside vacation school/interactive video-conference tutorials	32	58.2	18	32.7	2	3.6	3	5.5
9. The tutor supports and allow students to express fears and anxiety about the course	35	63.6	17	30.9	2	3.6	1	1.8

Table 5.15 continued overleaf

**TABLE 5.15 (continued)**  
**EVALUATION OF VACATION SCHOOLS AND INTERACTIVE**  
**VIDEO-CONFERENCE TUTORIALS**

STATEMENT	EXTENT OF AGREEMENT/DISAGREEMENT WITH STATEMENT							
	Agree		Disagree		Not applicable		No response	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
10. The tutorials offered during vacation schools/interactive video-conference tutorials enhance your understanding of the course material	41	74.6	11	20.0	2	3.6	1	1.8
11. Vacation schools/interactive video-conference tutorials are useful to clarify doubts/problems pertaining to your course	41	74.6	12	21.8	2	3.6	0	0.0
12. Vacation schools/interactive video-conference tutorials lessen feelings of loneliness and build confidence	37	67.3	16	29.1	2	3.6	0	0.0
13. Vacation schools/interactive video-conference tutorials allow you to be better prepared for examinations	44	80.0	9	16.3	2	3.6	0	0.0

Concerning the statements on vacation schools and interactive video-conference tutorials, more than 67% of the respondents evaluated this student support service positively and agreed with the statements.

Commenting on teaching methods and visual aids used during vacation schools to make the course interesting, easy to follow and rewarding, 34.5% of the respondents disagreed with this statement, which yielded a negative evaluation. In addition, 43.7% of the respondents felt that the overall attendance and punctuality of tutors during vacation schools were not good, while 32.7% of the

respondents indicated that tutors were not available to render additional consultation and academic support outside vacation schools and interactive video-conference tutorials. Of the respondents, 30.9% disagreed that tutors supported and allowed students to express fears and anxiety about the course, revealing a negative evaluation.

#### **5.2.3.4 Telephone tutoring**

Another way of reducing the distance between students and their institution is through the use of the telephone, particularly when students face sudden problems relevant to their studies. However, as already stated in table 5.9, more than 70% of the respondents did not make use of telephone tutorials. Only 21.8% of the respondents indicated that they made use of telephone tutorials (table 5.16). In contrast, 65.5% of the respondents indicated that they made use of their own or public telephones to contact their tutor (table 5.17). However, only 26 of these respondents (72.2%) benefited from contacting their tutors (table 5.18), while all the respondents (100.0%) indicated that they benefited from telephone tutorials (table 5.19).

**TABLE 5.16**  
**ATTENDANCE OF TELEPHONE TUTORIALS**

CATEGORY	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
YES	12	21.8
NO	43	78.2

**TABLE 5.17****USED OWN OR PUBLIC TELEPHONE TO CONTACT TUTOR**

CATEGORY	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
YES	36	65.5
NO	14	25.5
NO RESPONSE	5	9.1

**TABLE 5.18****BENEFITED FROM CONTACTING TUTOR USING OWN OR PUBLIC TELEPHONE**

CATEGORY	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
YES	26	72.2
NO	8	22.2
NO RESPONSE	2	5.6

**TABLE 5.19****BENEFITED FROM TELEPHONE TUTORIALS**

CATEGORY	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
YES	12	100.0
NOT APPLICABLE (Did not attend, see table 4.25)	43	0.0

**5.2.3.5 Evaluation of face-to-face/Saturday tutorials**

The results concerning agreement or disagreement on the 12 statements about face-to-face/Saturday tutorials are summarised in table 5.20.



**TABLE 5.20**  
**EVALUATION OF FACE-TO-FACE/SATURDAY TUTORIALS**

STATEMENT	EXTENT OF AGREEMENT/DISAGREEMENT WITH STATEMENT							
	Agree		Disagree		Not applicable		No response	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1. Scheduling of face-to-face tutorials suits your personal schedule	36	65.5	10	18.1	8	14.5	1	1.8
2. The tutor shows sound knowledge of his/her subject matter	37	67.2	9	16.4	8	14.5	1	1.8
3. Presentation of the subject matter is systematic, clear and effective	37	67.2	8	14.5	8	14.5	2	3.6
4. A variety of teaching methods and visual aids are used to make the course interesting, easy to follow and rewarding	31	56.3	15	27.3	8	14.5	1	1.8
5. The overall attendance and punctuality of the tutor during the face-to-face tutorials is good	23	41.8	22	40.0	8	14.5	2	3.6
6. The tutor encourages students to share their experiences/ knowledge	42	76.4	2	3.6	8	14.5	3	5.5
7. The tutor encourages questions and dialogue with the students	44	80.0	1	1.8	8	14.5	2	3.6
8. The face-to-face tutor is available to render additional consultation and academic support outside scheduled tutorials	35	63.7	9	16.4	8	14.5	3	5.5

Table 5.20 continued overleaf

**TABLE 5.20 (continued)**  
**EVALUATION OF FACE-TO-FACE/SATURDAY TUTORIALS**

STATEMENT	EXTENT OF AGREEMENT/DISAGREEMENT WITH STATEMENT							
	Agree		Disagree		Not applicable		No response	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
9. The tutor supports and allow students to express fears and anxiety about the course	34	61.8	10	18.1	8	14.5	3	5.5
10. The face-to-face tutorials enhance your understanding of the course material	38	69.1	7	12.7	8	14.5	2	3.6
11. Face-to-face tutorials are useful to clarify doubts/problems pertaining to your course	36	65.5	8	14.5	8	14.5	3	5.5
12. Face-to-face tutorials allow you to be better prepared for examinations	43	78.1	2	3.6	8	14.5	2	3.6

It appears that the majority of the respondents agreed with the statements and evaluated face-to-face/Saturday tutorials positively. Overall, students' opinion yielded satisfaction with the support received through face-to-face/Saturday tutorials.

However, discouraging to note is that 40% of the respondents disagreed with the statement that the overall attendance and punctuality of tutors during face-to-face/Saturday tutorials are good. This result suggested a negative evaluation to this statement.

### **5.2.3.6 Evaluation of the quality of tutor-marked assignments**

The opinion of the respondents on the quality of tutor-marked assignments is summarised in table 5.21.

**TABLE 5.21**  
**EVALUATION OF THE QUALITY OF TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENTS**

STATEMENT	EXTENT OF AGREEMENT/DISAGREEMENT WITH STATEMENT					
	Agree		Disagree		No response	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
1. Assignments are useful and an important teaching and learning device	52	94.5	1	1.8	2	3.6
2. Assignments are vague and difficult to attempt	24	43.6	27	49.1	4	7.3
3. Assignments are fair, testing the material that has been taught	38	69.1	14	25.5	3	5.5
4. Comments and feedback on assignments are comprehensive, detailed and helpful	23	41.9	28	50.9	4	7.3
5. Comments and feedback on assignments are constructive and relevant	26	47.3	26	47.3	3	5.5
6. The nature of the tutor's comments on assignments are encouraging	35	63.6	19	34.5	1	1.8
7. No comments and feedback are given	22	40.0	27	49.1	6	10.9
8. The tutor is available for consultation to provide academic support to complete assignments	26	47.3	28	50.9	1	1.8
9. The turn-around time of assignments is adequate	20	36.3	34	61.8	1	1.8

Despite the fact that the overall results on the evaluation of the quality of tutor-marked assignments yielded negative responses, 94.5% of the respondents indicated that assignments were meaningful and an important teaching and learning device. Of the respondents, 69.1% were also in agreement that assignments were fair, testing the material that had been taught. Of the subjects, 49.1% were in disagreement that assignments were vague and difficult to attempt, while 43.6% of them agreed with this statement.

The majority of the respondents were in disagreement with three of the statements on the quality of tutor-marked assignments. More than half (50.9%) of the respondents disagreed with the statement that comments and feedback on assignments were comprehensive, detailed and helpful, yielding a negative evaluation.

Interestingly, the same number of subjects, 47.3%, were in agreement and disagreement with the statement suggesting that comments and feedback on assignments were constructive and relevant. Similar results were obtained when students commented on marker-tutors' availability for consultation to provide academic support to complete assignments, with 50.9% of the students who reported that marker-tutors were not available for consultation, while 47.3% indicated that they were available for consultation.

The statement that no comments and feedback had been given yielded results indicating that more students disagreed (49.1%) than agreed (40.0%) with the statement, while 10.9% did not respond.

The majority of the respondents (61.8%) were of the opinion that the turn-around time of tutor-marked assignments was not adequate.

#### **5.2.4 The relationship between demographic variables and students' access to and evaluation of student support services**

The chi-square test ( $\chi^2$ ) as discussed in chapter four, section 4.3.4, was applied in order to investigate the effect of the various demographic variables (i.e. gender, age, marital status, highest qualification, distance from campus and transport to campus) on students' access to and evaluation of student support services.

The p-values associated with the chi-square value are not necessarily accurate, because the expected frequencies in many cells are small. However, since the contributions to the total chi-square test ( $\chi^2$ ) from these cells are very small, and the total chi-square mostly exceeds the critical values by far, the findings are taken to be valid.

#### 5.2.4.1 Analysis according to gender

When the data pertaining to students' access to and evaluation of student support services were analysed according to gender, significant differences were found for many of the statements.

Table 5.22 showed that significantly more male respondents (66.7%) made use of their own car compared to female respondents (16.7%). In addition, significantly more female respondents reported that they made use of taxis (66.7%) and hitch-hiking (16.7%) respectively, to travel to the campus, while only 33.3% of male students made use of taxis and none of them hitch-hiked to travel to the campus.

**TABLE 5.22**  
**TRANSPORT TO CAMPUS, BY GENDER**

GENDER	Transport to campus							
	Own car		Taxi		Hitch-hike		TOTAL	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Male	4	66.7	2	33.3	0	0.0	6	100.0
Female	8	16.7	32	66.7	8	16.7	48	100.0
TOTAL	12	22.2	34	63.0	8	14.8	54	100.0

Note:  $\chi^2 = 7.94$ ; df =2;  $p < 0.05$

The variable of gender further indicated in tables 5.23, 5.24 and 5.25 that significantly more male than female respondents were aware of access to computers, internet and e-mail services.

**TABLE 5.23**  
**AWARENESS OF ACCESS TO COMPUTERS, BY GENDER**

GENDER	Access to computers					
	Aware		Unaware		TOTAL	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Male	3	60.0	2	40.0	5	100.0
Female	9	22.0	32	78.0	41	100.0
TOTAL	12	26.1	34	73.9	46	100.0

Note:  $\chi^2 = 3.85$ ; df =1; p< 0.05

**TABLE 5.24**  
**AWARENESS OF ACCESS TO INTERNET, BY GENDER**

GENDER	Access to internet					
	Aware		Unaware		TOTAL	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Male	3	60.0	2	40.0	5	100.0
Female	5	12.8	34	87.2	39	100.0
TOTAL	8	18.2	36	81.8	44	100.0

Note:  $\chi^2 = 6.63$ ; df =1; p< 0.05

**TABLE 5.25**  
**AWARENESS OF ACCESS TO E-MAIL, BY GENDER**

GENDER	Access to e-mail					
	Aware		Unaware		TOTAL	
	N	%	N	%	N	%

<b>Male</b>	3	60.0	2	40.0	5	100.0
<b>Female</b>	4	10.3	35	89.7	39	100.0
<b>TOTAL</b>	7	15.9	37	84.1	44	100.0

Note:  $\chi^2 = 8.20$ ; df =1;  $p < 0.05$

With regard to statements on the quality of tutoring during vacation schools and interactive video-conferencing, tables 5.26, 5.27 and 5.28 showed that significantly more male respondents than female respondents disagreed with the statements.

**TABLE 5.26**  
**WHETHER TUTORS HAVE SOUND KNOWLEDGE OF SUBJECT**  
**MATTER, BY GENDER**

<b>GENDER</b>	<b>Extent of agreement or disagreement with statement</b>									
	<b>Strongly agree</b>		<b>Agree</b>		<b>Disagree</b>		<b>Strongly disagree</b>		<b>TOTAL</b>	
	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Male</b>	1	20.0	1	20.0	3	60.0	0	0.0	5	100.0
<b>Female</b>	16	40.0	18	45.0	3	7.5	3	7.5	40	100.0
<b>TOTAL</b>	17	37.8	19	42.2	6	13.3	3	6.7	45	100.0

Note:  $\chi^2 = 10.69$ ; df = 3;  $p < 0.05$

**TABLE 5.27**  
**WHETHER TUTORS ENCOURAGE STUDENTS TO SHARE**  
**EXPERIENCES/KNOWLEDGE, BY GENDER**

<b>GENDER</b>	<b>Extent of agreement or disagreement with statement</b>									
	<b>Strongly agree</b>		<b>Agree</b>		<b>Disagree</b>		<b>Strongly disagree</b>		<b>TOTAL</b>	
	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>

<b>Male</b>	2	40.0	2	40.0	1	20.0	0	0.0	5	100.0
<b>Female</b>	12	30.8	26	66.7	0	0.0	1	2.6	39	100.0
<b>TOTAL</b>	14	31.8	28	63.6	1	2.3	1	2.3	44	100.0

Note:  $\chi^2 = 8.54$ ; df = 3; p < 0.05

**TABLE 5.28**  
**WHETHER TUTORS ENCOURAGE QUESTIONS AND DIALOGUE**  
**WITH STUDENTS, BY GENDER**

<b>GENDER</b>	<b>Extent of agreement or disagreement with statement</b>									
	<b>Strongly agree</b>		<b>Agree</b>		<b>Disagree</b>		<b>Strongly disagree</b>		<b>TOTAL</b>	
	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Male</b>	2	40.0	2	40.0	0	0.0	1	20.0	5	100.0
<b>Female</b>	7	17.9	32	82.1	0	0.0	0	0.0	39	100.0
<b>TOTAL</b>	9	20.5	34	77.3	0	0.0	1	2.3	44	100.0

Note:  $\chi^2 = 9.87$ ; df = 2; p < 0.01

According to table 5.29, significantly more male than female respondents agreed with the statement that no comments/feedback were given on tutor-marked assignments.

**TABLE 5.29**  
**WHETHER NO COMMENTS/FEEDBACK ARE GIVEN ON**  
**TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENTS, BY GENDER**

<b>GENDER</b>	<b>Extent of agreement or disagreement with statement</b>									
	<b>Strongly agree</b>		<b>Agree</b>		<b>Disagree</b>		<b>Strongly disagree</b>		<b>TOTAL</b>	
	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>



<b>Male</b>	3	60.0	0	0.0	2	40.0	0	0.0	5	100.0
<b>Female</b>	7	16.3	12	27.9	12	27.9	12	27.9	43	100.0
<b>TOTAL</b>	10	20.8	12	25.0	14	29.2	12	25.0	48	100.0

Note:  $\chi^2 = 7.83$ ; df = 3; p < 0.05

#### 5.2.4.2 Analysis according to age

Another surprising picture emerged when data were analysed according to the respondents' age.

Mature aged students may enter the University of Namibia through the mature age scheme, without the necessary level of educational qualifications demanded of school leavers. Many mature aged students enter university after long periods away from study, without the requisite skills to ensure their success. It was therefore imperative in this study to determine students' level of educational qualifications. Responses to qualifications obtained by students reveal that more than half (59.3%) of the respondents had a teaching diploma or a teaching diploma with further qualifications.

According to table 5.30, significantly more respondents of 34 years and older compared to those younger than 34 years have a teaching diploma and further qualifications as their highest qualification.

**TABLE 5.30**  
**HIGHEST LEVEL OF QUALIFICATION, BY AGE**

AGE CATEGORY	Highest qualification									
	Certificate		Teaching Diploma		Teaching Diploma + further qualifications		Other		TOTAL	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%

<b>23 – 27</b>	0	0.0	1	25.0	0	0.0	3	75.0	4	100.0
<b>28 – 33</b>	3	16.7	9	50.0	0	0.0	6	33.3	18	100.0
<b>34 – 39</b>	4	25.0	7	43.8	4	25.0	1	6.3	16	100.0
<b>40 – 45</b>	5	41.7	3	25.0	4	33.3	0	0.0	12	100.0
<b>46 – 50</b>	0	0.0	0	0.0	2	100.0	0	0.0	2	100.0
<b>Older than 50</b>	0	0.0	0	0.0	2	100.0	0	0.0	2	100.0
<b>TOTAL</b>	12	22.2	20	37.0	12	22.2	10	18.5	54	100.0

Note:  $\chi^2 = 37.03$ ; df = 15;  $p < 0.01$

The variable of age revealed in table 5.31 that significantly more older students used their own car to travel to campus, while significantly more younger students made use of taxis to travel to campus.

**TABLE 5.31**  
**TRANSPORT TO CAMPUS, BY AGE**

<b>AGE CATEGORY</b>	<b>Transport to campus</b>							
	<b>Own car</b>		<b>Taxi</b>		<b>Hitch-hike</b>		<b>TOTAL</b>	
	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>23 – 27</b>	0	0.0	4	100.0	0	0.0	4	100.0
<b>28 – 33</b>	1	5.3	12	63.2	6	31.6	19	100.0
<b>34 – 39</b>	4	25.0	11	68.8	1	6.3	16	100.0
<b>40 – 45</b>	5	41.7	5	41.7	2	16.7	12	100.0
<b>46 – 50</b>	2	100.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	2	100.0
<b>Older than 50</b>	0	0.0	2	100.0	0	0.0	2	100.0
<b>TOTAL</b>	12	21.8	34	61.8	9	16.4	55	100.0

Note:  $\chi^2 = 20.11$ ; df = 10;  $p < 0.05$

With respect to students' evaluation of the attendance and punctuality of tutors during vacation schools and interactive video-conference tutorials, data in table

5.32 revealed that significantly more younger than older students disagreed with the statement that the overall attendance and punctuality of tutors is good.

**TABLE 5.32**  
**WHETHER OVERALL ATTENDANCE AND PUNCTUALITY OF**  
**TUTORS IS GOOD, BY AGE**

AGE CATEGORY	Extent of agreement or disagreement with statement									
	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree		TOTAL	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
23 – 27	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	25.0	3	75.0	4	100.0
28 – 33	1	5.6	6	33.3	8	44.4	3	16.7	18	100.0
34 – 39	2	13.3	6	40.0	4	26.7	3	20.0	15	100.0
40 – 45	3	25.0	8	66.7	1	8.3	0	0.0	12	100.0
46 – 50	1	50.0	0	0.0	1	50.0	0	0.0	2	100.0
Older than 50	1	50.0	1	50.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	2	100.0
<b>TOTAL</b>	8	15.1	21	39.6	15	28.3	9	17.0	53	100.0

Note:  $\chi^2 = 25.56$ ; df = 15;  $p < 0.05$

In addition, tables 5.33 and 5.34 revealed that younger students disagreed more than older students that comments/feedback on tutor-marked assignments were constructive, relevant and encouraging.

**TABLE 5.33**  
**WHETHER COMMENTS/FEEDBACK ARE CONSTRUCTIVE AND**  
**RELEVANT, BY AGE**

AGE	Extent of agreement or disagreement with statement				
	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	TOTAL

CATEGORY	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
23 – 27	0	0.0	1	25.0	0	0.0	3	75.0	4	100.0
28 – 33	2	11.8	6	35.3	4	23.5	5	29.4	17	100.0
34 – 39	2	12.5	5	31.3	8	50.0	1	6.3	16	100.0
40 – 45	4	33.3	3	25.0	4	33.3	1	8.3	12	100.0
46 – 50	2	100.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	2	100.0
Older than 50	0	0.0	1	100.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	100.0
TOTAL	10	19.2	16	30.8	16	30.8	10	19.2	52	100.0

Note:  $\chi^2 = 26.82$ ; df = 15;  $p < 0.05$

**TABLE 5.34**  
**WHETHER COMMENTS/FEEDBACK ARE ENCOURAGING, BY AGE**

AGE CATEGORY	Extent of agreement or disagreement with statement									
	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree		TOTAL	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
23 – 27	0	0.0	1	25.0	0	0.0	3	75.0	4	100.0
28 – 33	2	11.1	9	50.0	3	16.7	4	22.2	18	100.0
34 – 39	1	6.3	8	50.0	7	43.8	0	0.0	16	100.0
40 – 45	3	25.0	7	58.3	1	8.3	1	8.3	12	100.0
46 – 50	1	50.0	1	50.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	2	100.0
Older than 50	0	0.0	2	100.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	2	100.0
TOTAL	7	13.0	28	51.9	11	20.4	8	14.8	54	100.0

Note:  $\chi^2 = 27.06$ ; df = 15;  $p < 0.05$

#### 5.2.4.3 Analysis according to marital status

When students' access to and evaluation of student support services were analysed according to marital status, the following picture emerged. Table 5.35 showed that significantly more single respondents compared to married respondents were aware of access to computers at the northern campus.

**TABLE 5.35**  
**AWARENESS OF ACCESS TO COMPUTERS, BY MARITAL STATUS**

MARITAL STATUS	Access to computers					
	Aware		Unaware		TOTAL	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Single	8	42.1	11	57.9	19	100.0
Married	4	14.3	24	85.7	28	100.0
TOTAL	12	25.5	35	74.5	47	100.0

Note:  $\chi^2 = 4.6$ ; df =1; p< 0.05

Tables 5.36 and 5.37 further indicated that significantly more single students compared to married students disagreed that the overall attendance and punctuality of tutors is good and that the turn-around time of tutor-marked assignments is adequate.

**TABLE 5.36**  
**WHETHER OVERALL ATTENDANCE AND PUNCTUALITY OF TUTOR IS GOOD, BY MARITAL STATUS**

MARITAL STATUS	Extent of agreement or disagreement with statement									
	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree		TOTAL	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Single	0	0.0	9	45.0	4	20.0	7	35.0	20	100.0
Married	7	21.9	12	37.5	11	34.4	2	6.3	32	100.0
Widowed	1	100.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	100.0
TOTAL	8	15.1	21	39.6	15	28.3	9	17.0	53	100.0

Note:  $\chi^2 = 16.70$ ; df = 6; p < 0.05

**TABLE 5.37**  
**WHETHER TURN-AROUND TIME OF TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENTS IS ADEQUATE, BY MARITAL STATUS**

MARITAL STATUS	Extent of agreement or disagreement with statement									
	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree		TOTAL	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Single	3	14.3	0	0.0	6	28.6	12	57.1	21	100.0
Married	4	12.5	13	40.6	6	18.8	9	28.1	32	100.0
Widowed	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	100.0	1	100.0
TOTAL	7	13.0	13	24.1	12	22.2	22	40.7	54	100.0

Note:  $\chi^2 = 13.38$ ; df = 6;  $p < 0.05$

#### 5.2.4.4 Analysis according to highest level of qualification

A  $\chi^2$  analysis of the data revealed that there were significant differences in students' access to and evaluation of student support services with respect to highest level of qualification. For example, data in table 5.38 showed that significantly more students with higher levels of qualifications compared to students with certificates had access to make calls at work.

**TABLE 5.38**  
**ACCESS TO MAKE CALLS AT WORK, BY HIGHEST LEVEL OF QUALIFICATION**

HIGHEST LEVEL OF QUALIFICATION	Access to make calls at work					
	Yes		No		TOTAL	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
1. Certificate	2	16.7	10	83.3	12	100.0
2. Teaching Diploma	4	20.0	16	80.0	20	100.0
3. Teaching Diploma + further qualifications	7	58.3	5	41.7	12	100.0
4. Other	0	0.0	10	100.0	10	100.0

<b>TOTAL</b>	13	24.1	41	75.9	54	100.0
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Note:  $\chi^2 = 11.42$ ; df =3;  $p < 0.01$

The variable of highest level of qualification also had an influence on the use of internet. Table 5.39 revealed that students with higher levels of qualification used the internet often.

**TABLE 5.39**  
**USE OF INTERNET, BY HIGHEST LEVEL OF QUALIFICATION**

<b>HIGHEST LEVEL OF QUALIFICATION</b>	<b>Use of internet</b>							
	<b>Never</b>		<b>Seldom</b>		<b>Often</b>		<b>TOTAL</b>	
	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>1. Certificate</b>	8	72.7	3	27.3	0	0.0	11	100.0
<b>2. Teaching Diploma</b>	17	100.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	17	100.0
<b>3. Teaching Diploma + further qualifications</b>	9	75.0	0	0.0	3	25.0	12	100.0
<b>4. Other</b>	9	100.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	9	100.0
<b>TOTAL</b>	43	87.8	3	6.1	3	6.1	49	100.0

Note:  $\chi^2 = 20.56$ ; df = 6;  $p < 0.01$

According to tables 5.40 and 5.41, significantly more respondents with certificates as their highest level of qualification than respondents with teaching diplomas and teaching diplomas plus further qualifications disagreed that tutorials enhanced the understanding of course material and that tutorials allowed them to be better prepared for examinations.

**TABLE 5.40**  
**WHETHER TUTORIALS ENHANCE UNDERSTANDING OF COURSE MATERIAL, BY HIGHEST LEVEL OF QUALIFICATION**

HIGHEST LEVEL OF QUALIFICATION	Extent of agreement or disagreement with statement									
	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree		TOTAL	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1. Certificate	4	40.0	3	30.0	3	30.0	0	0.0	10	100.0
2. Teaching Diploma	6	46.2	4	30.8	2	15.4	1	7.7	13	100.0
3. Teaching Diploma + further qualifications	5	45.5	5	45.5	1	9.1	0	0.0	11	100.0
4. Other	0	0.0	10	100.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	10	100.0
TOTAL	15	34.1	22	50.0	6	13.6	1	2.3	44	100.0

Note:  $\chi^2 = 17.20$ ; df = 9;  $p < 0.05$

**TABLE 5.41**

**WHETHER TUTORIALS ALLOW RESPONDENTS TO BE BETTER  
PREPARED FOR EXAMINATION, BY HIGHEST LEVEL OF QUALIFICATION**

HIGHEST LEVEL OF QUALIFICATION	Extent of agreement or disagreement with statement									
	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree		TOTAL	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1. Certificate	2	20.0	6	60.0	2	20.0	0	0.0	10	100.0
2. Teaching Diploma	8	57.1	6	42.9	0	0.0	0	0.0	14	100.0
3. Teaching Diploma + further qualifications	7	63.6	4	36.4	0	0.0	0	0.0	11	100.0
4. Other	2	20.0	8	80.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	10	100.0
TOTAL	19	42.2	24	53.3	2	4.4	0	0.0	45	100.0

Note:  $\chi^2 = 13.57$ ; df = 6;  $p < 0.05$

Similarly, table 5.42 revealed that significantly more respondents with certificates, teaching diplomas and other qualifications than those with teaching diplomas and further qualifications disagreed that marker-tutors were available for academic support.

**TABLE 5.42**

**WHETHER MARKER-TUTOR IS AVAILABLE FOR ACADEMIC  
SUPPORT, BY HIGHEST LEVEL OF QUALIFICATION**

	Extent of agreement or disagreement with statement									
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OF QUALIFICATION	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree		TOTAL	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1. Certificate	0	0.0	4	33.3	6	50.0	2	16.7	12	100.0
2. Teaching Diploma	3	15.8	7	36.8	6	31.6	3	15.8	19	100.0
3. Teaching Diploma + further qualifications	0	0.0	10	83.3	1	8.3	1	8.3	12	100.0
4. Other	0	0.0	2	20.0	5	50.0	3	30.0	10	100.0
<b>TOTAL</b>	3	5.7	23	43.4	18	34.0	9	17.0	53	100.0

Note:  $\chi^2 = 17.07$ ; df = 9; p < 0.05

#### 5.2.4.5 Analysis according to distance from campus

With respect to students' access to and evaluation of student support services, data in table 5.43 indicated that significantly more students who stayed more than 80km from the northern campus did not have access to a telephone.

**TABLE 5.43**  
**ACCESS TO TELEPHONE, BY DISTANCE FROM CAMPUS**

DISTANCE FROM CAMPUS	Access to telephone					
	Yes		No		TOTAL	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
0-20km	9	90.0	1	10.0	10	100.0
21-40km	9	100.0	0	0.0	9	100.0
41-60km	5	62.5	3	37.5	8	100.0
61-80km	8	100.0	0	0.0	8	100.0
81-100km	8	66.7	4	33.3	12	100.0
More than 100km	4	50.0	4	50.0	8	100.0
<b>TOTAL</b>	43	78.2	12	21.8	55	100.0

Note:  $\chi^2 = 11.37$ ; df = 5; p < 0.05

When analysed according to distance from campus, data in table 5.44 revealed that significantly more students who stayed more than 80km from the northern campus, did not own a television set.

**TABLE 5.44**  
**OWN A TELEVISION SET, BY DISTANCE FROM CAMPUS**

<b>DISTANCE FROM CAMPUS</b>	<b>Own a television set</b>					
	<b>Yes</b>		<b>No</b>		<b>TOTAL</b>	
	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>0-20km</b>	8	80.0	2	20.0	10	100.0
<b>21-40km</b>	4	44.4	5	55.6	9	100.0
<b>41-60km</b>	5	62.5	3	37.5	8	100.0
<b>61-80km</b>	6	75.0	2	25.0	8	100.0
<b>81-100km</b>	5	41.7	7	58.3	12	100.0
<b>More than 100km</b>	0	0.0	8	100.0	8	100.0
<b>TOTAL</b>	28	50.9	27	49.1	55	100.0

Note:  $\chi^2 = 14.53$ ; df =5;  $p < 0.05$

The statement concerning tutors' overall attendance and punctuality during vacation schools and interactive video-conference tutorials was considered with regard to distance from campus, and table 5.45 indicated that significantly more students who stayed nearer to the northern campus, disagreed with this statement.

**TABLE 5.45**  
**WHETHER OVERALL ATTENDANCE AND PUNCTUALITY OF**  
**TUTORS IS GOOD, BY DISTANCE FROM CAMPUS**

DISTANCE FROM CAMPUS	Extent of agreement or disagreement with statement									
	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree		TOTAL	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
0-20km	0	0.0	6	60.0	3	30.0	1	10.0	10	100.0
21-40km	0	0.0	4	44.4	4	44.4	1	11.1	9	100.0
41-60km	1	14.3	1	14.3	5	71.4	0	0.0	7	100.0
61-80km	4	50.0	1	12.5	1	12.5	2	25.0	8	100.0
81-100km	2	16.7	8	66.7	0	0.0	2	16.7	12	100.0
More than 100km	1	14.3	1	14.3	2	28.6	3	42.9	7	100.0
<b>TOTAL</b>	8	15.1	21	39.6	15	28.3	9	17.0	53	100.0

Note:  $\chi^2 = 30.68$ ; df = 15; p < 0.01

This picture corresponds with responses in table 5.46, when significantly more students who stayed less than 61km from the northern campus, disagreed that tutorials enhanced the understanding of course material.

**TABLE 5.46**  
**WHETHER TUTORIALS ENHANCE UNDERSTANDING OF COURSE**  
**MATERIAL, BY DISTANCE FROM CAMPUS**

	Extent of agreement or disagreement with statement
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CAMPUS	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree		TOTAL	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
0-20km	2	33.3	3	50.0	1	16.7	0	0.0	6	100.0
21-40km	2	25.0	4	50.0	1	12.5	1	12.5	8	100.0
41-60km	0	0.0	3	42.9	4	57.1	0	0.0	7	100.0
61-80km	6	75.0	2	25.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	8	100.0
81-100km	2	22.2	7	77.8	0	0.0	0	0.0	9	100.0
More than 100km	3	42.9	4	57.1	0	0.0	0	0.0	7	100.0
<b>TOTAL</b>	15	33.3	23	51.1	6	13.3	1	2.2	45	100.0

Note:  $\chi^2 = 27.61$ ; df = 15; p < 0.05

### 5.2.5 Findings of the open-ended questions

The data solicited through the questionnaire were supplemented and enriched with data obtained through 11 open-ended questions. After each question had been explained and read out, respondents completed the open-ended questions in writing.

This approach was added to develop a general understanding of the respondents' perception of the quality of student support services provided at the northern campus. The open-ended questions also gave the respondents the opportunity to raise issues not covered by the scales of the questionnaire.

Because the open-ended questions included items that elicited responses to answer the research questions of this study, most categories came from the research questions.

The responses to the open-ended questions are reflected in tables 5.47 - 5.64.

**TABLE 5.47**  
**RESPONSE TO QUESTION 1**

<b>Question 1</b>	<b>What is your opinion regarding the provision of student support services at the University of Namibia's northern campus?</b>
	<p>The respondents shared a number of concerns and areas for improvement. None of the respondents shared positive opinions, i.e. that they were satisfied regarding the provision of student support services at the northern campus.</p> <p>Five respondents felt that the student support services should be improved and provided on time to meet students' needs.</p> <p>Three respondents claimed that staff did not have answers to their questions.</p> <p>Two students responded: <i>It's better than nothing.</i></p> <p>Seven respondents felt that tutors should be committed and should attend scheduled classes.</p> <p>Two respondents indicated that they needed more reference and prescribed textbooks in the library.</p> <p>Three respondents suggested that a monitoring system be put in place to track lost assignments.</p>

	<p>Eighteen respondents asked that they should receive study guides and tutor-marked assignments on time.</p> <p>Four respondents indicated that they would like to have orientation seminars immediately after registration.</p> <p>Eleven students did not respond to this question.</p>
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**TABLE 5.48**  
**RESPONSE TO QUESTION 2**

<b>Question 2</b>	<b>Do you regard the provision of student support services as being an advantage to a distance education student?</b>
	<p>Three students responded that student support services were an advantage to them, because of good face-to-face tutorials.</p> <p>Twenty-one students responded positively without stating any reasons.</p> <p>Nine students responded positively, but indicated that the student support services had to be improved.</p> <p>One student responded positively, although she was unhappy with the fact that a delay had occurred in her study process, due to lack of study material.</p> <p>Nine students responded: <i>Not at all</i>.</p> <p>Six respondents indicated that distance education students needed more support and responded positively.</p> <p>Two respondents felt that student support services helped with preparation for examinations and responded positively.</p>

	Four students did not respond.
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**TABLE 5.49**  
**RESPONSE TO QUESTION 3**

<b>Question 3</b>	<b>Which of the available student support services do you regard as the most effective and useful and why? (Which of these services do you think helped you most with your studies? Why?)</b>
	<p>Twenty-three students felt that face-to-face/Saturday tutorials and vacation schools were most effective and useful.</p> <p>Five respondents indicated that committed tutors, turning up for vacation schools and face-to-face/Saturday tutorials were the most effective and useful student support services.</p> <p>Six respondents identified library services as the most effective and useful student support service.</p> <p>Four students regarded good quality study guides as most effective and useful for their studies</p> <p>One student responded that vacation schools held in Windhoek were more effective than those scheduled at the northern campus.</p>

	Two students responded negatively to this question and reported: <i>None of the student support services are effective.</i>
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**TABLE 5.50**  
**RESPONSE TO QUESTION 4**

<b>Question 4</b>	<b>Which one of the available student support services do you regard as the least effective and why?</b>
	<p>One student indicated that tutor-marking was not effective, because the turn-around time of assignments was too long.</p> <p>Four students reported that study material was issued too late and their study programme had been delayed as a result.</p> <p>Two respondents felt that interactive video-conference tutorials were the least important student support service, because they experienced difficulties in asking questions during sessions.</p> <p>Eight students responded that face-to-face/Saturday tutorials were not effective, because the programme was not well organised.</p> <p>One student replied that course readers were the least important part of their course material.</p> <p>One student indicated that library services were not effective.</p> <p>Three respondents felt that vacation schools, scheduled at the northern campus, were not effective.</p> <p>Five students reported that all student support services were important; there were none that were not important.</p>



	<p>Five respondents replied that telephone-tutoring was not effective.</p> <p>One student indicated that internet and e-mail services were not important.</p> <p>One respondent felt that administrative support was not effective, because staff were not helpful.</p> <p>One student indicated that study groups were not effective.</p> <p>Twenty-one students did not respond to this question.</p>
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**TABLE 5.51**  
**RESPONSE TO QUESTION 5**

<b>Question 5</b>	<b>Can you be successful in your studies without making use of the available student support services?</b>
	<p>Six respondents indicated that they could be successful in their studies without making use of the available student support services, since <i>support is not enough and it does not make a difference</i>.</p> <p>Forty-three students responded positively to this question by indicating that they would not be successful with their studies without making use of student support services.</p> <p>Two respondents indicated a negative response and conveyed the following: <i>Yes, if I use enough reference books and get support from others</i>.</p> <p>One student answered yes and responded: <i>Yes, if I study hard</i>.</p> <p>Three students did not respond to this question.</p>

**TABLE 5.52**  
**RESPONSE TO QUESTION 6**

<b>Question 6</b>	<b>What do you do when you feel lonely/isolated as a distance education student?</b>
	<p>The participants shared a number of strategies they applied to deal with isolation:</p> <p>Three respondents indicated that they could not contact fellow students when they felt lonely, because they did not have access to telephones and stayed too far from each other.</p> <p>Sixteen students responded that they contacted study group members.</p> <p>One student replied: <i>I read non-academic literature to refresh my mind.</i></p> <p>Six students mentioned that they visited the library/campus.</p> <p>Two students replied: <i>I talk to someone who encourages/motivates me.</i></p> <p>Six students indicated that they phoned their tutor.</p> <p>Five students responded: <i>I feel like dropping my studies, because the support is not enough and not good.</i></p> <p>Three students mentioned that they attempted to do assignments, but were not always</p>

	<p>successful.</p> <p>Two students indicated that: <i>It feels like nobody cares.</i></p> <p>Five students replied that they didn't do anything.</p> <p>Two students responded that they exercised or listened to the radio.</p> <p>Four students did not respond to this question.</p>
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**TABLE 5.53**  
**RESPONSE TO QUESTION 7**

<b>Question 7</b>	<b>Do you feel you are a UNAM student? Do you feel a “sense of belonging” even though you are a distance education student?</b>
	<p>Most of the students responded positively to this question, while others shared the following comments:</p> <p><i>Yes, because I receive services from UNAM.</i></p> <p><i>Yes, because I acquire knowledge.</i></p> <p><i>Yes, even though I am a distance education student.</i></p> <p><i>Yes, but I am not motivated. I enrolled in 1998. It's the year 2003 and I still did not complete the first part of my degree, because of a lack of student support services and study material are not issued on time.</i></p> <p><i>Yes, but we need more support to be successful.</i></p> <p><i>Yes, because I feel good about myself, even though the support is poor.”</i></p> <p><i>Yes, but I feel like a neglected UNAM student.</i></p>

	<p>Six students replied: <i>No, we do not have rights. There is no SRC representative for distance education students.</i></p> <p>Three students did not respond to this question.</p>
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**TABLE 5.54**  
**RESPONSE TO QUESTION 8**

<b>Question 8</b>	<b>Which one of the available student support services do you often make use of and why?</b>
	<p>Two respondents mentioned that they most often used the library since <i>it is easy to borrow books and to make copies.</i></p> <p>Six students replied that they often used the library to do their assignments.</p> <p>Four students indicated that they most often made use of administrative support to enquire about the problems they experienced with their studies.</p> <p>One student replied: <i>I use study groups most often.</i></p> <p>Fourteen respondents felt that they most often made use of face-to-face/Saturday tutorials and vacation schools.</p> <p>Four students replied negatively to this question, stating that they did not make use of any student support service.</p> <p>Fourteen students did not respond to this question.</p>

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**TABLE 5.55**  
**RESPONSE TO QUESTION 9 (ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT)**

<b>Question 9</b>	<p><b>What problems, if any, did you experience in being able to use the following student support service?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Administrative support</b></li> </ul>
	<p>Two students mentioned that there was nobody to assist them with teaching practice enquiries.</p> <p>One student felt that the response to and turn-around time for administrative enquiries were too slow.</p> <p>Four students indicated that exemption results were not processed on time.</p> <p>Ten students felt that administrative staff had a careless attitude, were absent and were not helpful.</p> <p>Three students claimed that their assignments had got lost.</p> <p>Ten students claimed that study material and tutorial letters were not available upon registration.</p>

	<p>Seven students were not satisfied with the dispatch of examination results, examination timetables and vacation school timetables.</p> <p>One student indicated that the B.Ed. curriculum had changed and they had not been informed about it.</p> <p>Two students claimed that assignment marks were not computerised.</p> <p>One student felt that there was a communication problem between administrative staff and students.</p> <p>Seven students did not respond to this question.</p>
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**TABLE 5.56**  
**RESPONSE TO QUESTION 9 (ORIENTATION SEMINARS)**

<b>Question 9 (continued)</b>	<b>What problems, if any, did you experience in being able to use the following student support service?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Orientation</b></li> </ul>
	<p>Overall, students reported positively on orientation seminars, but raised the following:</p> <p><i>I did not receive any information or invitation to orientation seminars.</i></p> <p><i>They don't inform us about all the available student support services during orientation. I only realise now, when I completed this questionnaire, that telephone-tutoring is also available.</i></p> <p><i>The orientation seminar is too short to become known with everything.</i></p> <p><i>No career guidance and study skills are offered during orientation seminars.</i></p> <p>Seventeen students did not respond to this question.</p>

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**TABLE 5.57**  
**RESPONSE TO QUESTION 9 (VACATION SCHOOLS AND INTERACTIVE**  
**VIDEO-CONFERENCE TUTORIALS)**

<b>Question 9 (continued)</b>	<p><b>What problems, if any, did you experience in being able to use the following student support service?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Vacation schools and interactive-video conference tutorials</b></li> </ul>
	<p>Respondents, in general, were not satisfied with this support service and raised the following concerns:</p> <p><i>Clashes appear on the timetable and I miss out on tutorials.</i></p> <p><i>Tutors are absent and do not turn up for tutorials.</i></p> <p><i>All courses should be offered through interactive video-conference tutorials.</i></p> <p><i>Vacation school timetable is not issued on time.</i></p> <p><i>It seems like lecturers and tutors are not informed about vacation schools and are therefore absent.</i></p>

	<p><i>Lecturers give tutorials on different topics than those covered in assignments and examinations.</i></p> <p><i>I miss out on some courses, because not all courses are offered during vacation schools.</i></p> <p><i>Our tutors are not committed and prepared for their tutorials.</i></p> <p><i>The tutorial time is too short and I can't ask questions.</i></p> <p>Six students did not respond to this question.</p>
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**TABLE 5.58****RESPONSE TO QUESTION 9 (TELEPHONE TUTORING)**

<b>Question 9 (continued)</b>	<p><b>What problems, if any, did you experience in being able to use the following student support service?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Telephone-tutoring</b></li> </ul>
	The respondents mentioned the same concerns as reflected in table 5.12.

**TABLE 5.59****RESPONSE TO QUESTION 9 (FACE-TO-FACE TUTORIALS/SATURDAY TUTORIALS)**

<b>Question 9 (continued)</b>	<p><b>What problems, if any, did you experience in being able to use the following student support service?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Face-to-face/Saturday tutorials</b></li> </ul>
	<p>Thirteen respondents indicated that they had not experienced problems with face-to-face/Saturday tutorials.</p> <p>Twenty-five participants were dissatisfied with the quality of face-to-face/Saturday tutorials and the following problems were raised:</p> <p><i>The schedules of Saturday classes are changed, but not communicated to us.</i></p>



	<p><i>We waist our money to travel to campus for Saturday classes, because when we arrive, we wait for long hours and tutors do not turn up.</i></p> <p><i>Tutors are not recruited for all subjects and we do not get support in all subjects.</i></p> <p><i>It is not always tutors who are absent. Students also do not attend regularly and this discourages tutors.</i></p> <p><i>Some tutors are not qualified and prepared to teach the course effectively.</i></p> <p><i>I have to travel long distances to attend face-to-face tutorials.</i></p> <p>Eight students did not respond to this question.</p>
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**TABLE 5.60****RESPONSE TO QUESTION 9 (TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENTS)**

<b>Question 9 (continued)</b>	<b>What problems, if any, did you experience in being able to use the following student support service? Tutor-marked assignments</b>
	<p>The purpose of this question was to determine how the participants evaluated the quality and processing of tutor-marked assignments. All participants, except four, responded negatively to this question and conveyed the following reasons:</p> <p><i>Comments and feedback are not helpful. The comments do not help me to correct my mistakes. They are misleading.</i></p> <p><i>No comments/feedback are given.</i></p> <p><i>It takes too long before I receive my marked assignment back.</i></p> <p><i>The feedback is negative and I did not get any guidance.</i></p> <p><i>I would like to receive a feedback letter on the assignment questions.</i></p> <p><i>I cannot submit assignments on time, because we receive assignment questions after the due date of the assignment.</i></p> <p><i>Due dates for assignments must be scheduled after the vacation school, so we can get a chance to</i></p>

	<p><i>discuss and sort out problems before we do the assignments.</i></p> <p><i>Our assignment marks get lost and it is also not available on the computer.</i></p> <p><i>Re-submission of assignments is not helpful. I do my own work but I can only score 55%.</i></p> <p><i>Assignment questions are not related to my job at school, but they want us to be teachers before we enrol for the B.Ed.</i></p> <p><i>Part of my assignment was not marked.</i></p> <p><i>I don't know who my tutor is. The person's name appearing on the study guide is not my tutor. I don't know whom to contact if I have problems.</i></p>
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**TABLE 5.61****RESPONSE TO QUESTION 9 (LIBRARY FACILITIES)**

<b>Question 9 (continued)</b>	<b>What problems, if any, did you experience in being able to use the following student support service?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Library facilities</b></li> </ul>
	<p>The majority of the respondents were satisfied with the support they received through the library. However, the following needs were outlined:</p> <p><i>The reference books are not enough for all students. I want to take books home, but I cannot because other students must also use it.</i></p> <p><i>The library does not send relevant books to Oshakati. CES must inform them which books to send.</i></p> <p><i>I don't know how to use the library.</i></p> <p><i>We want to use the computers in the library, but only a short time is allowed.</i></p> <p><i>The library must be opened on Saturdays and after hours.</i></p> <p>Eleven students did not respond to this question.</p>

**TABLE 5.62**  
**RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS 9 (INTERNET AND E-MAIL SERVICES)**

<b>Question 9</b> <b>(continued)</b>	<b>What problems, if any, did you experience in being able to use the following student support service?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Internet and e-mail services</b></li> </ul>
	<p>Thirty-five students indicated that the problem they experienced with Internet and e-mail services, was that they did not know how to use it.</p> <p>Three students responded that they did not know whom to contact or how to get access.</p> <p>Two students reported that: <i>No one guides us on how to use it.</i></p> <p>One student mentioned that she stayed too far to have access during the week, and that services were not available on Saturdays.</p> <p>Thirteen students did not respond to this question.</p>

**TABLE 5.63**  
**RESPONSE TO QUESTION 10**

<b>Question 10</b>	<b>In your opinion, do you regard the provision of student support services as an attempt to meet the needs of distance education students?</b>
	<p>On the question whether the provision of student support services is an attempt to meet the needs of distance education students, the response was in the affirmative for the majority of the respondents.</p> <p>Some students agreed, but had the following comments:</p> <p><i>Yes, but not enough support is provided.</i></p> <p><i>Yes, because we are not full-time students.</i></p> <p><i>Yes, but tutors must be more committed.</i></p> <p>Two respondents answered negatively, while eleven students did not respond to this question.</p>

**TABLE 5.64**  
**RESPONSE TO QUESTION 11**

<b>Question 11</b>	<b>What student support services do you need which are not presently being addressed?</b>
	<p>On the question whether students need additional support services which are not presently being addressed, various suggestions and strategies were proposed to improve on the current services and to meet students' needs. The following suggestions were made:</p> <p><i>They must give us orientation sessions on teaching practice before we start with it.</i></p> <p><i>The vacation school sessions must be longer so we can spend more time to address problems.</i></p> <p><i>I need more library books and reference material.</i></p> <p><i>The tutors must give us feedback letters on our assignments.</i></p> <p><i>We are confused with the new B.Ed. subjects they added. The subjects were not in the prospectus when we started with the B.Ed. They must explain to us and give us orientation.</i></p>

	<p><i>They must arrange afternoon classes for those students who can attend.</i></p> <p><i>We are staying far from the northern campus. UNAM officials must provide accommodation on campus during vacation schools, like they do for students attending the Windhoek vacation school.</i></p> <p><i>We want to gain knowledge on how to use internet and e-mail services. All students must get computer literacy courses.</i></p> <p><i>I want orientation on how to use the library for my studies.</i></p> <p><i>There must also be a SRC representative for distance education students. Our problems are not taken to people who make decision.</i></p>
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Table 5.64 continued overleaf

**TABLE 5.64 (continued)**  
**RESPONSE TO QUESTION 11**

<b>Question 11 (continued)</b>	<b>What student support services do you need which are not presently being addressed?</b>
	<p><i>The telephone-tutorials must be organised better. We hear that the equipment is there, but we do not benefit from it.</i></p> <p><i>The staff at the northern campus need training on how to deal with students and they must get the correct information to answer our questions. Every time we have a question, they must first phone to Windhoek and we must wait days to get a response. We travel long distances and cannot come to the campus every day.</i></p> <p><i>Our face-to-face tutors must also mark our assignments so it will take quicker to receive it back.</i></p> <p><i>UNAM must establish a Dean of Students Office at the northern campus.</i></p> <p><i>All the support services must be improved.</i></p> <p><i>I live too far from the northern campus. The campus must be opened on Saturdays and</i></p>

	<p><i>after hours.</i></p> <p><i>Study material is always late. Every time I travel long distances to the campus, just to be told that the materials were not received from Windhoek. UNAM should rather send our study material through our personal address.</i></p> <p><i>I want a schedule for the year, with all the dates, so I don't miss out.</i></p> <p><i>CES management must also come and visit us, listen to our problems and do something about it. We never see them.</i></p> <p>Thirteen students did not respond to this question.</p>
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### 5.3 SUMMARY

This chapter provided a descriptive summary of the results obtained from the questionnaire in order to determine students' access to student support services; their evaluation of the quality of student support services provided at the northern campus; and the relationship between demographic variables and students' access to and evaluation of student support services.

In the next chapter, these findings will be discussed in more detail to use the data from students to test and adjust the model of support services for distance education students that emerged from the literature review. The study will be concluded in the final chapter by formulating recommendations.

**CHAPTER 6****DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS OF RESULTS****6.1 INTRODUCTION**

With emerging arguments that open and distance learning is increasingly being regarded as a viable policy option for developing countries with limited educational resources for buildings, books and trained teachers, seeking to increase accessibility for large numbers of students in education and training opportunities (Lentell and O'Rourke, 2004), it is essential to review and evaluate how support to students is provided, particularly, if student success is to remain the key measure of institutional success, and if open and distance learning is to retain its student-centred mission.

As a result, the driving motivation behind this study was the belief that the effectiveness of any open and distance learning programme is dependent on an institution's responsiveness to its students' needs and expectations. This belief calls for an integrated student support system that is continuously modified and refined as institutional and government policies and procedures change and new student needs and expectations emerge. Students' evaluation of services, as an integral part of quality assurance in open and distance learning, has long been regarded as essential in order to move on from the reputation of poor provision derived from the historical legacy of correspondence education where that was often indeed the case (Tait, 1997).

The objective of this chapter is to interpret the results of the study and examine the possible implications for a modified and refined student support model that meets the needs and expectations of adult distance education students in Namibia.



The interpretation of the results will be done in the order in which they were presented in the preceding chapter.

## **6.2 DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS**

### **6.2.1 Student profile**

This study has provided a composite profile of distance education students at the northern campus of the University of Namibia. It not only shows some similarities with previous reports, but also adds considerably to our understanding of who are our Namibian tertiary distance education students.

Participants in the study were primarily women. The proportion of women responding to the evaluation instrument was 88.9% (see table 5.1), which is consistent with their overall participation rate at the University of Namibia's Centre for External Studies.

It was furthermore evident that the current findings on age range fit with the overall picture of adult distance education students in Namibia, with more than half of the respondents in the 28-39 age bracket (see table 5.1).

Consistent with the findings of Taplin and Jegede (2001), distance education students in this study were largely married (60%) and employed (96%), as reflected in tables 5.2 and 5.3.

Previous education level has been described as a significant predictor of academic success for adult distance education students in general (Bajtelsmit, 1990) and particularly for women students (Brent and Bugbee, 1993). The current study has also added a finer analysis of students' level of previous educational qualification and shows that more than half of the respondents had a teaching diploma or a teaching diploma with further qualifications (see table 5.30).

In addition, this study reinforces the perception that tertiary distance education in Namibia is largely reaching the geographically isolated, with half of the respondents residing more than 60km from the northern campus.

### **6.2.2 Access to and attendance of student support services**

Participants' responses on access to and attendance of 14 student support services covered both administrative and academic student support services available at the northern campus, namely study facilities; library facilities; photocopying facilities; access to computers, internet, e-mail; audio/video facilities; study groups; developmental counselling; orientation for new students; vacation schools; face-to-face/Saturday tutorials; telephone tutorials and interactive video-conference tutorials.

#### **6.2.2.1 Use of study and library facilities**

The findings of this study have provided evidence that more than half of the respondents made use of study and library facilities available at the northern campus (see table 5.9). This finding was supported by students' responses to open-ended questions whereby a major portion of them were of the opinion that library services was one of the most effective and useful student support services. However, a few students also responded that library services were not effective, because prescribed and recommended textbooks were not available. In addition, concern was raised by some students that they did not know how to use the library, while others suggested that the library be opened on Saturdays and after hours (see table 5.61). This finding corresponds with findings from Crawford and Gorman (1995) who reported that using modern libraries was a concern for many adults returning to study, since they battled with the practicalities of returning to study, coming to grips with open learning, and issues such as referencing.

### **6.2.2.2 Use of computers, internet and e-mail services**

Table 5.9 yielded results indicating that almost 80% of the respondents did not make use of modern information and communication technology (ICT). This result corresponds with the results in table 5.6, indicating that the majority of students did not own a computer or had regular access to a computer or internet and e-mail services. Moreover, the overwhelming majority of the respondents reported that they did not know how to use computer, internet and e-mail services, as illustrated in table 5.10. Paralleling this finding is respondents' particular disagreement as reflected in table 5.13, that adequate and timely support was available regarding guidance and assistance on how to access and use ICT. This finding mirrors findings by Bird and Morgan (2003) who noted that adults entering university without prerequisite information technology skills are at considerable disadvantage initially, which may compound their sense of being overwhelmed or not "belonging". Their ability to overcome these initial hurdles will be closely related to the level of understanding and practical support offered by the university.

### **6.2.2.3 Use of developmental counselling**

The data revealed that almost half of the respondents did not make use of developmental counselling services (see table 5.9), with 32.8% of them indicating reasons such as: *don't know who is responsible for this service; not aware of such a service; service is poor, rather want to drop out; staff do not have time to attend to us; and staff do not have answers to our questions* in table 5.11 for not making use of developmental counselling services. The greatest frustration expressed by the respondents was that they did not find consistency in their constant search for clarity of institutional practices and requirements. A primary source of this frustration was the recent change in the B.Ed. curriculum and the requirement for teaching practice. The suggestions below, noted in table 5.64, clearly demonstrate students' frustration in this regard:

*They must give us orientation sessions on teaching practice before we start with it.*

*We are confused with the new B.Ed. subjects they added. These subjects were not in the prospectus when we started with the B.Ed. They must explain to us and give us orientation.*

While there is justification and need for such changes and requirements, responsible administrators must give explicit consideration to the impact upon distance education students when such changes become necessary. It is imperative that frequent and timely in-service training be held for regional staff to assure that the information that they distribute to students is up to date and accurate.

The necessity for readily available developmental counselling is further highlighted and supported by Lentell and O'Rourke (2004:5) who observed that:

*...adult education experience suggests that at least 50% of a student's needs are not strictly related to the subject at hand. That is not to say that their needs are solely psychological and unconnected with the content of study; the help they need is of an educational kind, even of an academic kind, but not strictly subject-based.*

#### **6.2.2.4 Attendance of orientation for new students**

Consistent with previous literature, the results in table 5.9 revealed that only 20% of the respondents never attended orientation seminars for new students, while 41.9% often attended orientation seminars for new students. This finding supports the suggestion by Bird and Morgan (2003) that the ability of today's distance education student to become part of a learning community depends on the provision of detailed explanations of the types of academic and administrative student support provided by the particular university, so that new students can feel confident that support is not only close at hand, but that it is also something to which they are entitled. Similar findings were reported by Potter (1998) who

found that respondents attached primary importance to orientation to the media and delivery format as well as to learning resources.

Moreover, particularly women, who constituted 89% of the respondents for this study (see table 5.1), often enter higher education after long absences from any formal education and need to balance a variety of complex commitments in their lives. It has been suggested (Kirkup and Von Prümmer, 1997) that more female than male distance education students suffer from the isolation of studying at a distance, and that for women it was particularly important to have access to some sort of personal communication with the university to “humanise their studies” and help them to “feel valued” (Hipp, 1997:44). This may explain the finding that many of the respondents attended orientation seminars, even if it was difficult for them to get there. In this respect, results in table 5.8 indicated that 61.8% of the respondents, the majority of whom were women, made use of taxis as means of transport to the northern campus.

#### **6.2.2.5 Use of study groups**

This study has shown that 61.8% of the respondents often made use of study groups. Moreover, the majority of students commented that they contacted fellow students in their study groups when they felt lonely or isolated. This finding mirrors findings by Chadibe (2002) who described how participation in self-directed study groups enabled UNISA students to make better use of distance education courses.

The importance of contact with fellow students is emphasised by Lentell and O'Rourke (2004:4) who cite Betram's (2003) observation that learners are adopting a communal approach to learning by sharing responsibility for reading and explaining the course materials.

#### **6.2.2.6 Attendance of face-to-face/Saturday tutorials and vacation schools**

Concerning the opportunities provided for face-to-face/Saturday tutorials and vacation schools, results in table 5.9 revealed that 80% of the respondents often attended vacation schools, while 54.6% often attended face-to-face/Saturday tutorials. Furthermore, the majority of participants viewed face-to-face tutorials and vacation schools as the most valuable support service and integral to their studies as reflected in table 5.49. This finding is similar to that of Fung and Carr (2000), who reported that the attendance rate at tutorials for students at the Open University of Hong Kong was very high, with over 70% of them attending over 75% of the tutorials, including 30% who attended all.

The importance of residential opportunities for distance education students is evident and has been reported in the literature. Workman and Stenard (1996:8), elaborate that during the formative years of the United Kingdom's Open University (UKOU), it was noted that summer residential experiences created a strong renewal of confidence and commitment among the students: "If the summer school does one thing more than any other, it gives a new confidence to the students... additional strength to go back to their home-based studies." Not surprisingly, Chickering (1974) suggested that residential experiences be created for all non-traditional students because of the strong positive influences on the students' personal academic development.

#### **6.2.2.7 Use of telephone-tutoring**

Another way of reducing the distance between students and their institution and to minimise the isolation they experience is through the use of the telephone. However, the findings from table 5.9 revealed that the majority of respondents (70.9%) never attended telephone tutorials or used the telephone to contact their tutors. Though results in table 5.4 showed that more than 70% of the respondents had access to telephones, the findings represented in table 5.12

showed that many students did not make use of this support service for the following reasons: they did not have the contact details of their tutors; it was too expensive; tutors were not willing to help; tutors were not available when they phoned, or they did not return voice-mail messages.

Telephone-tutoring is very important, particularly when students face sudden problems relating to their studies. This was emphasised by Rekkedal (1983) who pointed out that telephone-tutoring enables students to get individualised attention from the tutor. The findings of this study further correspond with the findings from Purnell, Cuskelly and Danaher (1996), who found that most students reported that they got no response when they made use of the telephone to contact their tutors. The many demands upon students and tutors meant that personal contact could be difficult. Both groups generally work full-time during the day, and students typically study at night and on weekends when academic staff are not available. Brown (1996) further commented that inability to obtain timely, practical input or feedback might be dispiriting, which is a commonly cited reason for discontinuance. Effective use of voicemail and being able to contact staff outside normal working hours is therefore important to distance education students.

### **6.2.3 Evaluation of student support services**

From an analysis of the students' responses to statements that covered several aspects relevant to the quality of various student support services available to distance education students enrolled at the northern campus of the University of Namibia, the statements were grouped into six categories of student support services, namely administrative support, orientation, vacation schools/interactive video-conference tutorials, telephone tutorials, face-to-face/Saturday tutorials and tutor-marking.

### **6.2.3.1 Administrative support**

The administrative support system embraces the admission procedures, the registration process, accessing information from records, distribution of course materials, submission of assignments for marking, and arrangement of face-to-face/Saturday tutorials.

The results of the evaluation of administrative student support services were positive. Findings in table 5.13 indicated that more than half of the students were satisfied and agreed that adequate and timely administrative support was provided.

However, a considerable number of respondents felt that administrative staff had a careless attitude, were absent and not helpful, as reflected in table 5.55. This finding is consistent with the finding of Benza, Chitsika, Mvere, Nyakupinda and Mugadzaweta (1999) that non-academic staff did not accord Zimbabwe Open University students the respect that is commensurate with their age and maturity. The general feeling was that students were being treated like school children. This is unfortunate and is what Moore (1993) calls the diminishing of students by an institution. This approach is counter-productive as students will not enjoy their studies in such an environment.

Another bone of contention among students was the slow turn-around time with regard to administrative enquiries and assignments as demonstrated by one student who suggested (see table 5.64) that:

*The staff at the northern campus need training on how to deal with students and they must get the correct information to answer our questions. Every time we have a question, they must first phone to Windhoek and we must wait days to get a response. We travel long distances and cannot come to the campus every day.*



These concerns raised by students in this study support Bird and Morgan's (2003) suggestion that regional centres usually provide a first point of contact for many students and the accuracy and timeliness of information provided to students at this point is critical to their future.

Some of the respondents were also unhappy with the dispatch of examination results, examination timetables and vacation school timetables, as reflected in table 5.55. The students felt that such information should be forwarded well in advance to each individual student through the postal services, while one student suggested:

*I want a schedule for the year with all the dates, so I don't miss out (see table 5.64).*

### **6.2.3.2 Orientation seminars**

With regard to the trend of all the responses, the results in table 5.14 revealed that the respondents were satisfied with the effectiveness and value of orientation seminars. Respondents, however, expressed their frustration about lack of awareness of student support services. The findings in table 5.14 indicated that less than half of the respondents agreed that the orientation seminar had made them aware of all the student support services available at the northern campus. For example, students expressed their concerns and experience with orientation seminars:

*The orientation seminar is too short to become known with everything.*

*They don't inform us about all the services during orientation. I only realise now, when I completed this questionnaire, that telephone-tutoring is also available (see table 5.56).*

Consistent with previous literature, students commented: *No career guidance and study skills are offered during orientation seminars*. This supports Benza, Chitsika, Mvere, Nyakupinda and Mugadzaweta (1999) who revealed that respondents indicated dissatisfaction with the guidance and counselling received in respect of orientation to studies by distance education, including exposure to the requisite study skills. This need for orientation on study skills and preparedness for independent learning further supports Calder and McCollum (1998) and Candy (1991) who noted that the solo study arrangements that distance education most commonly affords are clearly not suited to everyone. Students are often required to find far greater reserves of self-discipline and time management skills than in prior educational experiences.

#### **6.2.3.3 *Vacation schools/interactive video-conference and face-to-face/Saturday tutorials***

Findings in tables 5.15 and 5.20 illustrated that more than two-thirds of the respondents in this study believed that in order to be successful in their studies, personal contact with their tutors through vacation schools/interactive video-conference tutorials and face-to-face/Saturday tutorials is of vital importance. When asked which one of the available student support services they most often made use of, results in table 5.49, revealed that the majority had replied that they most often attended face-to-face tutorials and vacation schools, because it was the most effective and useful student support service. In addition, the high attendance rate for vacation schools and face-to-face tutorials reported earlier (see table 5.9), also suggests that students felt a strong need for tutorials to support their studies.

However, students' expectations about, hopes for, and level of satisfaction with tutorial provision also revealed negative results. There was considerable expectation that tutorials should lead to improvement in their performance, particularly in examinations. This expectation is clearly demonstrated in table 5.57, by one student's comment:

*Lecturers give tutorials on different topics than those covered in assignments and examinations.*

When analysed according to highest level of qualification, results in tables 5.40 and 5.41 revealed that significantly more respondents with certificates as their highest level of qualification than respondents with teaching diplomas and teaching diplomas plus further qualifications disagreed that tutorials enhanced their understanding of course material and that tutorials allowed them to be better prepared for examinations. For most of the students, the forms of tutorial support, with which they are most familiar and comfortable, are those where the tutor “teaches”. They therefore expect to be assisted with their assignments, guided through their studies and pass their examinations.

The expectation that tutorials should be concerned primarily with assignment and examination questions is not uncommon among distance education students. For example, Stevenson, Sander and Naylor (1996) reported that a high proportion of the UKOU students in their study expected tutors at tutorials to devote time to forthcoming course assignments. Fung and Carr (2000) noted that such expectations are understandable, given the conflicting demands of study, work and family commitments faced by adult learners, who may, therefore, become rather “instrumental” in their attitudes to learning. They tend to look for specific support and guidance from tutors to help them to complete their studies successfully.

Furthermore, the finding illustrated in table 5.40, that significantly more respondents with certificates as their highest level of qualification reported that tutorials did not enhance their understanding of course material, could be attributed to the fact that they preferred a largely directive approach in tutorials, which also appears to confirm the general belief that many of Namibia’s adult distance education students are compliant and passive learners. This finding is further clarified by Bird and Morgan (2003) who noted that expectations of

students entering university might be largely formed by previous educational experiences and study approaches. Negative prior experiences will affect students' confidence and self-concept, as well as their ability to form new teaching and learning relationships, and develop more appropriate approaches to study. For some, a lifetime of responses to highly teacher-controlled, teacher-centred education may be difficult to cast off in favour of independent and lifelong learning strategies. It is therefore evident that previous education level can be a significant predictor of academic success for adult distance education students. This finding also corresponds with the finding from Brent and Bugbee (1993) who noted that those who do not have a strong educational background lack the meta-cognitive skills needed for approaching their coursework and examinations.

Most participants in this study had no choice with respect to the method of course delivery. Distance education was the only suitable option available locally, though some had chosen to study by open learning modalities because of the flexibility it offered in terms of its delivery. However, whilst the flexibility often provides the opportunity to study, it may also prove problematic for some students. Moreover, students in the study were returning to education after a period of many years and for most it was their first experience of higher education by distance education mode. It is therefore important to understand the emotional impact of returning to study as a mature learner. Students therefore indicated the need for tutors to encourage questions and dialogue and to allow them to express fears and anxiety about the course.

When analysed according to gender, the results in tables 5.26, 5.27 and 5.28 revealed that significantly more male than female students disagreed that tutors had a sound knowledge of subject matter; encouraged students to share their experiences/knowledge and encouraged questions and dialogue with students. One possible explanation for this is McGivney's (1996) argument that men are more likely to cite course-related reasons if they experience difficulties in their studies, whereas women are more likely to cite reasons to do with family

commitments and the lack, inadequacy or costs of childcare. She further noted that this had been found in all types of provision, including distance learning.

Concerning tutors' punctuality and attendance of tutorials and whether tutorials enhanced understanding of course material, data in tables 5.32, 5.36, 5.45 and 5.46 showed that significantly more single, younger students and those staying nearer to the northern campus, disagreed that tutors were punctual and that tutorials enhanced the understanding of course material. One possible explanation for this finding is that more students who were single, younger and who stayed nearer to the campus, had the opportunity to attend tutorials than those who were married or stayed further away from the campus. As a result, they were more exposed to and experienced the occurrence of tutors who were not punctual, who did not turn up for their classes and tutorials that did not meet their needs for understanding the course material.

However, responses to open-ended question 9 in table 5.59 revealed that married students and students who lived far away from the campus experienced similar frustrations. The passage below demonstrates this:

*We waist our money to travel to campus for Saturday classes, because when we arrive, we wait for long hours and many times, they just do not turn up.*

*I have to travel long distances to attend tutorials.*

*The schedules of Saturday classes are changed, but not communicated to us.*

These frustrations support McGivney's (2004:41) argument that some institutions are not adult-friendly. She noted that:

*Some mature students feel alienated when their existing skills and experiences are not taken into account or when*

*their outside commitments are ignored. I recently met a mature under-graduate with three children who had to travel a considerable distance to her nearest university. She complained that in her first term induction meetings, lectures and seminars were frequently cancelled or re-scheduled without any prior notice: do they think that my time is less valuable than theirs?*

In this context, Simpson (2002:79) argued that:

*Distance education students who are making considerable efforts to attend rare and distant tutorials may expect a higher quality of support than students at conventional institutions who can shrug off the occasional system failure or poor tutorial.*

Such practices can cause resentment and disillusionment and predicate early withdrawal.

#### **6.2.3.4 Tutor-marking**

Although the overwhelming majority of respondents in this study indicated in table 5.21 that tutor-marked assignments are meaningful and an important teaching and learning device, nearly all had experienced some level of dissatisfaction in this area. This was clarified by their comments in the follow-up open-ended questions regarding turn-around time and feedback on tutor-marked assignments (see table 5.60).

Participants were frustrated at being required to submit assignments as part of their formative assessment, while the slow turn-around time and inadequate feedback on assignments made it extremely difficult for them to perform as expected. This finding supports the suggestion by Purnell, Cuskelly and Danaher (1996) that issues such as turn-around time and quality feedback that can

enhance student achievement need careful attention since these can be critical in supporting students in their studies.

In a study reported by Benza, Chitsika, Mvere, Nyakupinda and Mugadzaweta (1999), students felt that the assignment turn-around period was unsatisfactory. They argue that students appear to have made a genuine observation because feedback on marked assignments is the most critical tutoring strategy in open and distance learning. The earlier the feedback is provided the more it is likely to have a positive impact on the students' performance.

When analysed according to gender, the data in table 5.29 further revealed that significantly more male than female respondents expressed the concern that no comments or feedback had been given on their assignments. A possible explanation could be that male students are specifically much more dependent on support from their tutors than female students. With the absence of support from tutors, men may feel discouraged, while women tend to display a preference for cooperative learning in supportive environments where they can share their problems as found by Burnham (1988), Hipp (1997) and Kumar (1999). The major portion of the respondents in this study were women and the findings reported in table 5.9 revealed that 61.8% of the respondents often made use of study groups. In addition, it has been suggested (Kirkup and Von Prümmer, 1997) that more female than male distance education students suffer from the isolation of studying at a distance, and that for women it was particularly important to have access to some sort of personal communication. Taplin and Jegede (2001) further reported that women prefer and are more likely to seek further support from peer or colleagues than from tutors, hence the men reported more difficulties with their studies than women.

The results in tables 5.33 and 5.34 furthermore indicated that significantly more younger and single students disagreed that comments and feedback on tutor-marked assignments were constructive, relevant and encouraging and that tutors

were available for consultation to provide academic support to complete assignments. This could indicate that it is probable that younger students, entering higher education programmes through open and distance learning, immediately after completing their secondary education, require a greater degree of motivation as they were used to a system where there may be other “pull factors” (McGivney, 2004:42) like social elements, set course times and face-to-face contact with tutors. While outside constraints relating to work and family prove to negatively affect mature, married students’ performance, many of them manage to overcome such pressures. This is often due to personal drive and motivation. McGivney (2004:42) noted:

*Lecturers and tutors find that mature students tend to be more motivated than younger students for a number of reasons: because the course or programme is something that they long wanted to do; because they have made sacrifices in order to participate; because they want to prove to themselves and others that they are capable of learning and gaining a qualification; or because they need or are required to study for career or employment reasons.*

The results obtained from the questionnaire and open-ended questions of this study provide information on students’ access to and attendance of various student support services and the evaluation of these services, offered at the northern campus of the University of Namibia. These student support services included study and library facilities; access to computer, internet and e-mail services; developmental counselling services; orientation for new students; study groups; vacation schools and interactive video-conference tutorials; face-to-face/Saturday tutorials and telephone tutorials.

In some cases, the findings appeared to relate to the specific context of Namibia; in others they showed similarities to results reported elsewhere. The most significant result in this study is that respondents attached primary importance to



communication with both administrative and support staff and their tutors. Certainly, this study illustrated that students value highly academic support from tutors which enhances their understanding of the course materials and provides general guidance on their assignments. Their high attendance rates suggest that many tutors were meeting this expressed need. The expectations that tutorials should be concerned primarily with covering course content and assignments showed that actual practice in tutorials deviated from students' prior preference. However, this did not necessarily lead to a low evaluation of them. It seems that as long as tutors are able to organise fruitful tutorials, which meet students' expectations of enhancing their learning, Namibian students are ready to participate in a variety of tutorial formats.

Other factors contributing to a high attendance rate of tutorials related to certain attributes of the tutors themselves – their being able to present the subject matter systematically, clearly and effectively. The cultural context in which a distance education system operates, and the previous educational experience of its students, inevitably has some effect on the expectations and learning styles of adult distance education students. The results from this study, for example, suggest that student expectations on the functions and formats of tutorials are inclined to passive, tutor-directed approaches.

The importance of communication with fellow students; assistance in accessing study and library facilities; assistance received from administrative and support staff and assistance to access and use computers, internet and e-mail services were highlighted by many respondents and identified as vital for helping them in learning by distance education mode.

Likewise, respondents identified a number of factors in the open-ended questions as hindering their academic progress. Difficulties in communicating and contacting administrative and support staff and tutors were identified. Many respondents also expressed a sense of isolation.

Problems with course design and implementation were identified as hindrances to success. Although not formally a support service, the issue of course material availability was clearly significant to respondents. Respondents commented on late course materials, unresponsive tutors, lack of access to prescribed books and a lack of response from the staff at both the northern campus and the main campus. Poor course materials, for example unclear expectations and guidelines for completion of assignments, and a lack of high quality and timely feedback on assignments were also mentioned as hindrances to success.

There was an abundance of findings on suggestions and recommendations regarding the improvement of student support services to meet students' needs and expectations. In particular, respondents wanted timely and constructive feedback on assignments. Assistance with study skills development and guidance on the use of internet and e-mail services was suggested, and several students commented on the need for more and better tutoring services geared to their specific needs.

Improving communication with staff and tutors also received attention. Regular contact, whether by telephone or face-to-face, was clearly a priority. Respondents also suggested that comprehensive information about available student support services be provided during orientation seminars.

Respondents had much to say about ways in which the Centre for External Studies could smooth their study career. Primary among these suggestions were the issues of improved access to library resources; the establishment of a Dean of Students Office at the northern campus; a Student Representative Council member for distance education students; and closer contact between students at the northern campus and the Centre for External Studies Management through regular campus visits and meetings. The provision of timely and accurate

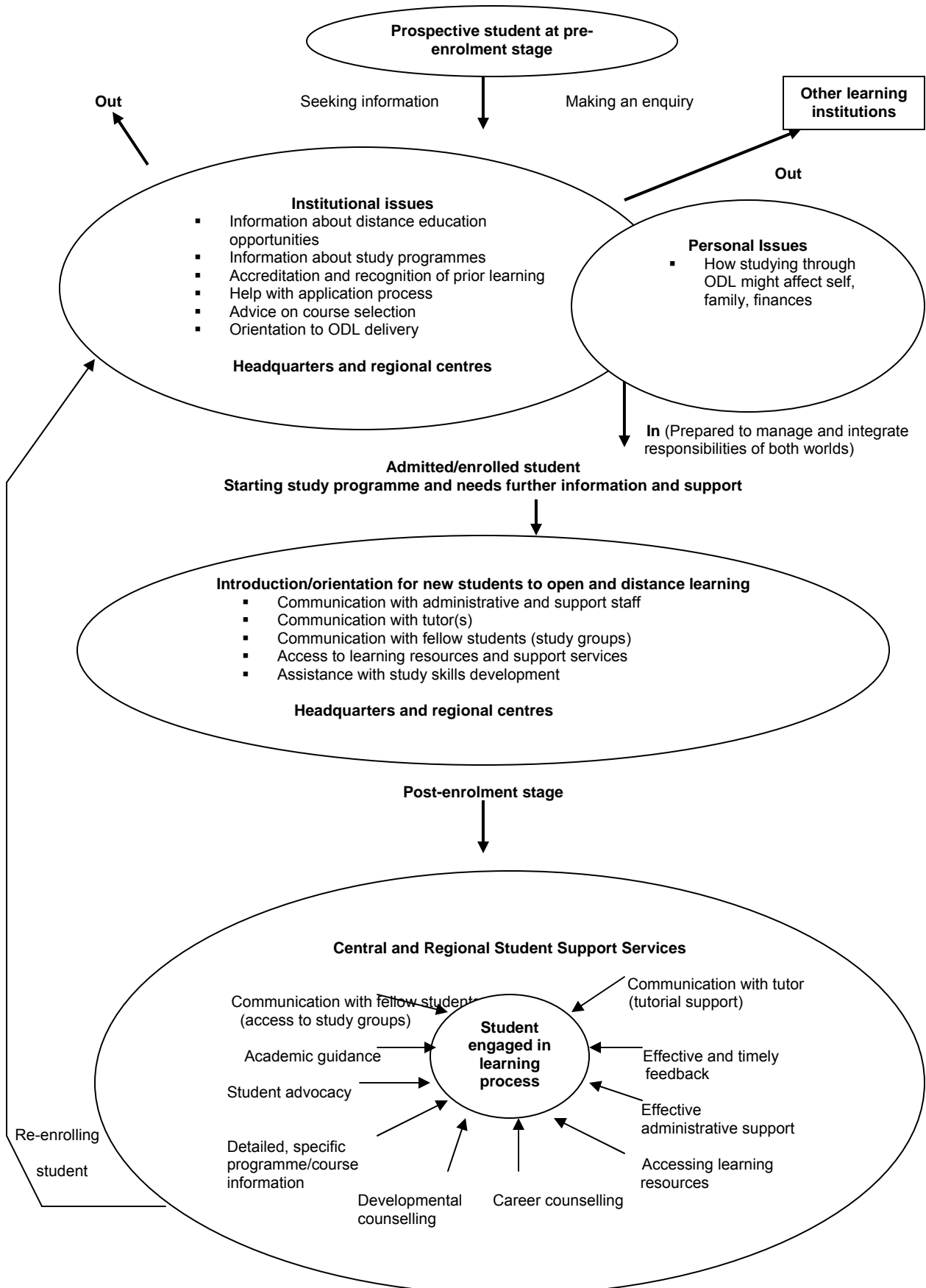
information and of clear procedures for problem solving was significant to these students.

Access to academic guidance was important to respondents, as they were confused with the changes in the B.Ed curriculum, which were implemented after their initial enrolment. With respect to administrative support services provided during admission and registration, respondents stressed the need for accurate and clear procedures.

### **6.3 IMPLICATIONS AND A SUGGESTED STUDENT SUPPORT MODEL FOR THE UNIVERSITY OF NAMIBIA'S CENTRE FOR EXTERNAL STUDIES**

For distance education students, continuing their education requires the linking of two worlds, that is, their personal sphere with that of the institution. Although the same might be said of any educational experience for any student, the need for integration is emphasised by the particular characteristics of adult distance education students (adults with home, family, employment, and community responsibilities) and by the lack (for the majority of these students) of the physical presence of the institution in their everyday lives. Distance education students interviewed in this study provided an account of individuals trying to integrate both worlds – the personal and the institutional – and to manage the responsibilities required of both. In an attempt to address their student support needs and meet their expectations to integrate both worlds, the results of this study suggest the following model of student support services for distance education students (figure 6.1), as adapted from Brindley (1993).

FIGURE 6.1: MODEL OF STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES



The model presented in figure 6.1 is based on a broad definition of student support and suits an institution that views support as a holistic function and that is prepared to provide an integrated and distributed approach. It takes a student perspective and assumes that support is best provided by multi-skilled professionals with a broad base of experience who can call on specialist advice when and if it is needed. It rests however, on a high degree of staff training and good organisation and coordination.

The model is inclusive, acknowledging the importance of providing quality information, advice and guidance at pre-enrolment, early and post-enrolment stages (McInnis-Rankin and Brindley, 1986; Zaykowski, 1993). Support provided at these stages is essential for distance education students to permit them to successfully plan and develop a course of study.

In order to implement this student support model successfully, the Centre for External Studies needs to allocate greater institutional resources to aspects of career counselling and academic planning, rather than just providing generic course or programme information at the pre-enrolment stage. Brindley (1993), states that it is at this pre-enrolment stage that enquiries into the recognition and accreditation of prior learning must be addressed. These initial enquiries for institutional information and advice will often be made at the main campus in Windhoek, but there is evidence to support the flexibility of local or regional responses to enquiries. Students in this study indicated their need for ready personal contact and interaction at this stage and a centralised open and distance learning institution may not be able to respond in time. As a result, the Centre for External Studies should provide regular and thorough information sessions on current developments regarding course and programme information to regional staff for them to provide adequate and resourceful information to prospective students at the pre-enrolment stage.

Some prospective students will make the decision not to enrol while others may be guided by staff towards other learning institutions that better meet their needs. Students will then need an introduction or orientation to open and distance learning to provide a safe and structured introduction or return to higher education. In the next section of the model those who have admission to courses and programmes should be able to access a wide range of administrative and academic support. The Centre for External Studies should therefore ensure that the following services are available at central and regional level:

- effective administrative support;
- specific course and programme information;
- academic guidance;
- access to learning resources;
- access to study groups;
- tutorial support (including one-to-one tutorial assistance, regional face-to-face tutorials, week-long vacation schools and telephone tutoring);
- effective and timely feedback;
- developmental counselling;
- student advocacy; and
- career counselling.

Not all student support services indicated are required by all students, but because of individual differences among adult distance education students, something that may be insignificant to one may be of crucial importance to another and may make a vital difference. Therefore, in considering students' support service needs and expectations, the Centre for External Studies cannot simply plan for the majority. In addition, some student support services need to be available at all stages, as each student will move through the learning process at a different pace. A systemic approach to this model, which captures student support as a process, rather than as a series of second order activities, is

therefore proposed to ensure equalising opportunities for all students, irrespective of their different needs.

## **6.4 SUMMARY**

The concluding model of support services presented in figure 6.1 not only represents the views of participants included in this study, but also relates to the work of adult and distance educators who are interested in issues related to student retention in open and distance learning in higher education. The model further provides a guide for the individualised type of thinking required to humanise what many describe as an industrialised form of education (Peters, 1989 and Sewart, 1993).

This study has systematically probed the issue of the kinds of student support services that are needed and by whom. It was therefore evident that a systematic review of student support service needs and the integration of these needs into institutional considerations and planning for open and distance learning be carried out on a regular basis.

In the next chapter, conclusions will be drawn and recommendations will be formulated.

**CHAPTER 7****CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS****7.1 INTRODUCTION**

Pursuing higher education through open and distance learning offers a great deal of promise in Namibia, a country of vast geography, and a widely distributed population. The opportunity to learn away from a physical university campus, either at home or in a local community or regional setting, can provide the flexibility required by adults who wish or need to continue their education but have multiple roles and responsibilities that do not allow full-time study or on-campus attendance.

However, open and distance learning presents challenges to both the providing institution and its students which are above and beyond those faced by campus-based students. As it is the goal of student support services to address some of these challenges and to reduce barriers and facilitate academic endeavours, the purpose of this study was to make a contribution to understanding the pivotal role students' evaluation of student support services can play in the implementation and provision of quality student support services.

A combination of both quantitative and qualitative methodologies was chosen in order to follow a suitable research plan and to gather the necessary data that would answer the research questions of this study. Furthermore, both positivist and interpretive research suited this study, since objective facts as well as the meanings students attach to such facts were crucial for the purpose of this study. A literature review as well as an empirical investigation was accordingly conducted. The literature review provided a view of the international development regarding the specific design, development and provision of student support



services for adult distance education students. The empirical investigation provided a description and evaluation of the kinds of student support services that are needed. It specifically probed issues related to importance, accessibility and suggestions for improvement on student support services provided at the northern campus of the University of Namibia.

## **7.2 CONCLUSIONS**

In view of the literature and findings of this study, the following conclusions were formulated:

### **7.2.1 The international trend regarding the provision of student support services for distance education students**

Initially, and for some time, the emphasis on distance education has been on preparing courses, and then on finding and implementing means of making them available off campus. In recent years, however, there has been evidence of increasing critical reflection on an approach that may have given technology prominence over the student. Today, distance education institutions and authors are demonstrating greater concern with human questions relating, for example, to access and participation, student characteristics, persistence and factors that contribute to success and satisfaction for distance education students. As a result, literature of this nature on support services for distance education students is growing, although it is still limited.

Distance education institutions all over the world have been challenged to transform their policies and procedures to accommodate the ever-growing number of students. At the same time, the growing number of students are putting more pressure on institutions to provide more services. Fundamental to these services is the provision of student support and thus objectives of institutions are not focused on the production of highly acclaimed course materials only, but also on the production of successful students.

The main task of any distance education provider is to design and offer distance educational experience that encourages learning. As such, distance education providers need to understand that their educational products and services are to service the distance education student and to provide an encouraging educational experience for him/her. In doing so, many factors need to be considered in developing and delivering distance education courses to achieve effective and efficient implementation. One factor that this study revealed that affects distance education students' success is the provision of quality student support services made available by institutions and tutors.

The current trend for and challenge to distance education institutions is to move swiftly, purposefully and productively to embrace the concept of student support, to put in place an implementation infrastructure and to develop into a successful institution. In this respect, success in any distance education institution will be underpinned by the sharing of a common vision and model of support, which places the student firmly at the centre of everyone's effort.

Another conclusion that can be drawn is that institutional policy and the role of management are crucial in the establishing an effective student support model to facilitate distance learning. Strong leadership of the distance education unit is of crucial importance to the success of a distance education programme. Perhaps more importantly, the support of Senior University Management is a necessary precondition for the success of distance education in a dual-mode institution where opposition and scepticism from traditional academics about the possibility to do real academic teaching by distance education is prevalent.

### **7.2.2 Evaluation of student support services provided at the northern campus of the University of Namibia**

As evident from the findings of this study, many of the respondents agree that a strong concern in distance education is the aspect of the loneliness or isolation

experienced by the student. It is for this reason that student support needs to be as supportive and non-judgemental as possible.

It is also evident that there is an urgent training and development need for distance education tutors at the Centre for External Studies regarding student support and the role that they can and should fulfil. If the University is asking the students to engage in quite new ways of learning, then it seems logical to require tutors to engage in new ways of teaching. Tutors must therefore rethink their views about teaching distance education students.

The respondents value timely feedback from administrative staff and their tutors regarding course assignments, examination results and administrative inquiries. It is important then for administrative staff, student support staff and tutors to attend to their students promptly and effectively. Respondents are of the opinion that such commitment will help to improve learning and ease much frustration.

Also emanating from students' evaluation of student support services was the need for and importance of contact with tutors. Specifically, students in this study placed the greatest importance on services related to:

- getting started with their studies, for example orientation sessions about available student support services and information about getting prescribed and recommended textbooks; and
- contact and communication with tutors and fellow students by means of vacation schools, face-to-face tutorials on Saturdays at regional centres and support through study groups.

Finally, students were of the opinion that there are many constraints with which they have to cope in distance education. Learning the skills needed for distance learning may not be easy for all of them. They were of the opinion that the provision of student support services is undoubtedly necessary for success in distance education. Without it, as evident from this study, learning at a distance

does not come easy, since this mode of instruction poses great challenges to some students.

The principal objective of student support is to produce distance education students who are able to progress through their programmes successfully, to develop into independent students who have good learning skills and strategies, and to interact effectively with tutors, course materials and fellow students. This calls for greater attention to the issue of student support and its role in distance education.

### **7.3 RECOMMENDATIONS**

While some success has been achieved in providing student support services for distance education students through the Centre for External Studies of the University of Namibia, the results discussed in the previous chapter raise many pertinent recommendations for the improvement of student support services and the successful provision of open and distance learning.

Without exception, students expressed their need for diversified and improved student support services and demanded quality education that is flexible in its delivery. The literature (Brent and Bugbee, 1993; Carmichael, 1995; Chadibe, 2002; Dillon, Gunawardena and Parker, 1992; Simpson, 2000 and Tait, 2000) indicates that distance education students need support services that contribute to:

- maintaining or increasing student motivation;
- promoting effective study skills;
- generate a sense of “belonging” to the providing institution through, for example, contact with tutors and other students for both social and academic purposes;
- providing guidance through the course materials;
- providing access to resources; and
- providing answers to administrative queries.

It is in recognition of these needs, and the ability to respond appropriately, that the foundations of quality open learning provision lie. Students must be recognised as adults with life responsibilities who are prone to life events. Tait (2000) argued that while a minority of students in any institution regard themselves as almost entirely autonomous, it is clear that a majority welcome student support services, and in fact always demand more. As a result, support structures to facilitate cognitive, affective and systemic functions of a student support system need to be in place to address students' personal and professional development.

The recommendations that follow emanate from the results reported earlier and must be interpreted within the theoretical framework of this study and address the needs of adult distance education students at three different stages of the learning process. In essence, respondents seemed to ask the Centre for External Studies to provide the information they require, streamline processes and procedures, help reduce their sense of isolation, and give them the academic tools they need to succeed. The following recommendations are therefore put forward:

- The Centre for External Studies should consider the call for providing quality student support as an integral part of the delivery of open and distance learning as a priority.
- Reliable communications and good logistics should be available at the northern campus. Both are essential so that the distance between the system and its users does not introduce unacceptable delays between the availability of course materials and their actual use by students; between posing a question and getting an answer; and between sending an assignment and receiving the corresponding evaluation.

- The role of the tutor should be redefined, as indicated by the findings of this study. Improving tutorial support specifically implies that the role of the tutor is multifaceted. Tutors' skills in offering student support are not only vital, but also unique. This is largely because tutors should be supportive, and adult distance education students have a wide range of needs that are different from those of the average school leaver entering higher education. This means that the Centre for External Studies should assign more responsibility to the tutors and set up mechanisms that make it possible for students and tutors to stay in direct contact. In addition, systems should be set up to make the tutor accountable. The selection of tutors must be thorough. Consequently, these changes would include financial restructuring. Involving the tutors more in the tutoring process, means having to improve their financial compensation. This indicates that extra funds should be made available for student support. As tutors would need to spend more time on tutoring, performing different tasks in addition to their traditional role as "markers" of assignments, work to perform such extra tasks must be financially compensated, as tutor fees are currently based on marking only. In addition, the findings of this study revealed clearly that the Centre for External Studies should expect the tutors to become much more personally involved and accountable for tutor-student interaction. This recommendation is likely to result in an increase in tutor costs, both with regard to an increased workload for the tutor and costs involved for tutor training.
- It is vitally important that all resource materials reach students in good time. The student support staff should therefore ensure that all relevant information be fully accessible to the student. It is not enough, for instance, to provide students with an extensive bibliographical list, without making sure that all the corresponding references are equally and readily available at the library and campus bookshop.

- The Centre for External Studies should conduct periodic and regular studies of its distance education students to determine who they are and what their needs are. Breakdowns of the student population, for example, by gender, age, location, study programme, as well as detailed information regarding personal and professional circumstances, can contribute substantially to understanding this clientele. This will contribute to the design, development and provision of student support services that will be tailored to students' specific needs and expectations.
  
- If the Centre for External Studies is concerned about student success in distance education and wishes to make higher education more accessible, attention must be paid to support services that help reduce barriers. The model for student support services suggested in the previous chapter provides a grounded framework from which to work. Support services that may counteract barriers and attend to students' needs and expectations as expressed in the findings of this study, include convenient access to prescribed textbooks and other learning resources, as well as to assistance with logistics and solving problems arising from the distance between the student and the campus. Well-designed course material and effective and timely feedback processes are recommended. Good developmental counselling and academic guidance services, for example assistance with developing study skills, are recommended to diminish barriers. Specifically, developmental counselling and support should include the role to help students build confidence, enhance their learning skills, and maintain a commitment to their studies. This kind of support does not necessarily require subject-matter expertise, so it should be possible to make it available at regional level. Regional staff responsible for this service should be sensitised that counselling is intended to develop confidence, and enable students to make informed decisions. This is particularly relevant to adult students who face a myriad of

- personal and special problems which include role conflict, financial pressures, learning difficulties and confusion about their goals.
- It is clear from the findings that the communication of the availability of various student support services to distance education students is also a challenge. Special attention should therefore be paid to devising ways of informing students about the available support services. It would be ideal for the Centre for External Studies to organise orientation programmes for new students, as these programmes are designed to assist students in many ways. These programmes could:
    - help students in their transition to life as tertiary students, and particularly as distance education students;
    - develop in these students a sense of identification with the institution and familiarise them with its functioning;
    - introduce them particularly to the instructional package and the delivery system;
    - introduce them to facilities they may access during their period of study;
    - familiarise them with the self-directed learning method, thereby structuring goal independence and individual accountability;
    - help, encourage and motivate them by a local environment; and
    - help minimise a number of post-entry problems, thereby reducing the drop-out rate.
  
  - Students expressed their frustration at the difficulty of making contact by phone and the long distances they had to travel to the northern campus to seek vital information and support. An associated concern was the lack of approachability of administrative staff at the northern campus. It is therefore recommended that administrative and support staff ensure that the correct and prompt information and guidance are given to students for them to take the best decision on their course.



- A number of students commented on their disappointment with the quality of feedback on tutor-marked assignments and it is therefore recommended that the Centre for External Studies further strengthen its assignment monitoring system to assess both the marking standards (i.e. are grades comparable across tutors offering the same course) and the quality of tuition (i.e. are students getting speedy, accurate and helpful feedback on their assignments). Issues such as turn-around time and quality feedback that can enhance student achievement, need careful attention, since these can be critical in supporting students in their studies.
- The Centre for External Studies should establish a procedure for identifying and following up absent or under-performing students, especially for those students who failed to complete their first assignment. Tutors and support staff should take swift action to determine the cause of non-completion of assignments and provide help and support for students who are experiencing difficulties. It is anticipated that in many cases it will result in significantly increased retention rates.
- A major factor that assists distance education students in building self-esteem and in developing a strong identity with the institution, is interpersonal relationships with fellow students, tutors and support staff. Without exception, students in this study expressed their need for communicating with fellow students and tutors. The importance of residential opportunities such as vacation schools and face-to-face/Saturday tutorials is also evident from the findings of this study. It is therefore recommended that the Centre for External Studies should continue to provide adequate training for tutors, since it is essential that tutors are well prepared for the special challenges presented by open and distance learning. As tutors are the main persons with whom students will

be in contact about their coursework, the quality of tutors' feedback and advice can have a decisive impact on progress and persistence.

- Students also expressed the need for more tutorials. Supplemental tutoring should be provided by using interactive video-conferencing, which is currently under-utilised and only used twice a year during the week-long vacation schools.
  
- This study revealed that the formation of local study groups could help to maintain the motivation of isolated distance education students. In recognition of the essential support that is inherent in peer relationships, it is recommended that the Centre for External Studies put students in contact with each other. A very simple but effective means to improve peer communication and support is to publish directories on students enrolled for the same course. Such directories should include the students' names, contact details and course(s) enrolled for. However, those who wish not to be listed, should be given an opportunity to prevent their inclusion in such directories by means of a check-off on the registration form.
  
- As noted earlier, adults entering university without the prerequisite information technology skills are at a considerable disadvantage. Their ability to overcome this disadvantage will be closely related to the level of understanding and practical support offered by the University. The majority of students in this study commented on their lack of information and communication technology (ICT) skills and indicated their need for computer literacy training. It is therefore recommended that the Centre for External Studies implement and design an appropriate ICT course to empower students adequately for the use of modern ICT. The technology required to implement such a course at the northern campus is available through networked computers in the library.

- It is further recommended that the Centre for External Studies carry out an analysis on accessibility to ICT on a frequent basis in order to maintain currency, since the availability of ICT is rapidly changing in developing countries. As ICT becomes more and more widely used, the Centre for External Studies also needs to take informed decisions about the extent to which it will make use of ICT to strengthen existing delivery mechanisms and supplement existing student support services, keeping in mind that different students will choose support media according to different criteria at different times of their study. An important aim for the Centre for External Studies will be to analyse these different criteria for its students in order to make appropriate decisions about the particular media mix for its course delivery and student support services.

Moreover, an analysis should be carried out on existing practices on ODL delivery through ICT at other open and distance learning providers in order to benefit from lessons learnt. The ODL community expected that delivery of open and distance learning programmes through the use of modern ICT would open up doors and widen access. It was believed that it would enhance equity, that students would prefer it and that it would contribute towards sustainability. However, Zemsky and Massy (2004) reported that those who promote, fund and depend on e-learning need to talk less and succeed more. The early adopters need to understand that their success depends as much on the context in which they operate as on the power of the technologies they employ. Although technology brings more options, technologies by themselves are simply the tools or the implements. It takes a teacher to impart substance, content and meaning to any technology and its use. In this context, Sir John Daniel, in his opening remarks at the third Pan Commonwealth Conference in Dunedin, stated:

*We should take a breather in e-learning and re-evaluate our practices. We should pay attention to the*

*specific pedagogy required to deliver courses through ICT and pay attention to the approach necessary and not the technology alone.*

(Daniel, 2004:4)

## **7.4 FINAL REFLECTION**

Researchers observed that many distance education students do not finish their courses, often because of inadequate attention to student support services. The results of this study indicate that adult distance education students regard the provision of administrative support, orientation seminars for new students, vacation schools/interactive video-conference tutorials, telephone-tutoring, face-to-face/Saturday tutorials and quality and timely feedback on tutor-marked assignments as pivotal to the success of their studies.

In this study, a case has therefore been made that the provision of student support services, according to the diverse needs and expectations of adult distance education students, should be an integral part of the provision of open and distance learning.

As the learning landscape is gradually changing and more and more learning opportunities are being offered through open and distance learning, it is important that the Centre for External Studies give increased attention to not only the cognitive needs of students, but also to the affective and systemic needs. As such, the Centre for External Studies should take cognisance of the evaluation of student support services as expressed in this study, and couple it with the situational and dispositional realities of students to develop multifaceted student support services and implement an improved student support model.

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## APPENDIX A

**TO:** Ms. D. Shinyemba  
Mr. L. Kafidi  
The Directors: Oshana and Omusati Educational Regions

**FROM:** Ms. D.L. Möwes  
Assistant Registrar: Centre for Open and Lifelong Learning  
Polytechnic of Namibia

**DATE:** 5 June 2003

**RE: PERMISSION TO DO DATA COLLECTION AT SCHOOLS FROM  
THE OSHANA AND OMUSATI REGIONS**

I hereby would like to ask your permission to do part of my research for Ph.D. studies at schools situated in the Oshana and Omusati regions. My research topic is: **The evaluation of student support services in open and distance learning at the University of Namibia.**

I want to administer a questionnaire and interview to teachers studying through the University of Namibia's Centre for External Studies who receive student support services through the University of Namibia Northern Campus. I am intending to visit some of the schools during the week of 9<sup>th</sup> –13<sup>th</sup> June to do a pilot study in order to test my data collection instruments. I will have to pay a second visit during August/September this year in order to do the actual data collection.

Please take note that this research is purely academic. I will personally administer the questionnaire and interview schedule in order to clarify issues that might arise.

Thank you for considering my request and I hope to have a positive response.

Yours sincerely  
Ms. Delvaline Möwes  
(Student number: 13963945-2002)

## **APPENDIX B**

### **EVALUATION INSTRUMENT FOR SUPPORT SERVICES PROVIDED BY THE CENTRE FOR EXTERNAL STUDIES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NAMIBIA NORTHERN CAMPUS**

#### **Dear Student**

Thank you for participating in this research project. The aim of this project is to evaluate the support services provided to distance education students studying through the University of Namibia.

For the purpose of this study, the elements of open and distance learning which are commonly referred to as student support services are made up of: orientation for new students; tutoring, whether face-to-face, by correspondence, telephone, or electronically; interactive teaching through video; the organisation of regional centres and administrative support.

These services have as key conceptual components the notion of supporting the individual learning of the student whether alone or in groups, while in contrast, the mass-produced study material are identical for all students.

#### **INSTRUCTIONS**

1. Please ensure that you **answer all the questions** frankly and objectively, using your own judgement and experiences.
2. Do not discuss the instrument with fellow students while completing them. Your individual opinions will be valued.
3. Complete each question by marking your response with a (✓) in the appropriate space provided. Should you need any clarification on any matter, do not hesitate to ask me.
4. Your response will only be used for research purposes. It will be impossible to identify the respondents involved after the completed instruments have been processed.

***Thank you for your cooperation!***

**SECTION A: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION**

In this section I would like to know a little about you to evaluate different students' opinion, about the services provided.

1. Indicate whether you are:

Male	1
Female	2

2. Which one of the following age categories applies to you?

17-22	1
23-27	2
28-33	3
34-39	4
40-45	5
46-50	6
Older than 50	7

3. What is your marital status?

Single	1
Married	2
Divorced/Separated	3
Widowed	4

4. Please indicate your highest level of qualification achieved (please mark only one qualification)

Certificate	1
Teaching diploma	2
Teaching diploma plus further qualifications	3
Teaching degree	4
Teaching degree plus postgraduate qualification	5
Degree plus teaching diploma	6
Degree, teaching diploma plus additional postgraduate qualification	7
Other (Please specify) .....	8

5. Are you presently employed?

Yes	1
No	2

6. Do you own or have access to:

Home (own) telephone	1
Work telephone to make calls	2
Work telephone to receive calls	3
Television set	4
Radio	5
Audio cassette recorder	6
Video cassette recorder	7
Computer	8
Internet and/or e-mail	9

7. Indicate how far you live from the nearest Post Office?

0-20km	1
21-40km	2
41-60km	3
61-80km	4
81-100km	5
More than 100km	6

8. Indicate how far you live from the University of Namibia (UNAM) Northern Campus?

0-20km	1
21-40km	2
41-60km	3
61-80km	4
81-100km	5
More than 100km	6

9. Indicate the transport you often make use of to visit the UNAM Northern Campus.

Own car	1
Taxi	2
Friend's car	3
Hitchhike	4
Other	5



**SECTION B: ACCESS TO AND ATTENDANCE RATES OF STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES**

1. Indicate whether you are aware of the availability of the following support services at the UNAM Northern Campus.

SERVICE	AWARE	UNAWARE
	1	2
Administrative support (admission; registration; advice on course exemptions, course amendments, change of address/examination centre; financial services; issuing of study material)		
Study facilities		
Library services		
Photo copying services		
Access to computers		
Access to Internet		
Access to e-mail		
Audio/Video facilities		
Assistance to form study groups		
Counselling responsive to students' decisions regarding studying through distance mode, enrolment, course choice, withdrawal/dropout		
Orientation for new students (1 <sup>st</sup> year students)		
Vacation schools		
Face-to-face tutorials/Saturday Classes		
Telephone tutorials		
Interactive video conferencing		

2. Indicate how often you visit the UNAM Northern Campus during an academic year to make use of the following support services.

SERVICE	NEVER	SELDOM	OFTEN	VERY OFTEN
	1	2	3	4
Study facilities				
Library services				
Photo copying services				
Access to computers				
Access to Internet				
Access to e-mail				
Audio/Video facilities				
Discussions with fellow students in study groups				
Counselling responsive to students' decisions regarding studying through distance mode, enrolment, course choice, withdrawal/dropout				
Orientation for new students (1 <sup>st</sup> year students)				
Vacation schools				
Face-to-face tutorials/Saturday classes				
Telephone tutorials				
Interactive video conferencing				

3. If your answer to any of the above services is NEVER, please state your reason for not making use of such a service.

SERVICE	REASON
Study facilities	
Library services	
Photo copying services	
Access to computers	
Access to Internet	
Access to e-mail	
Audio/Video facilities	
Discussions with fellow students in study groups	
Counselling responsive to students' decisions regarding studying through distance mode, enrolment, course choice, withdrawal/dropout	

SERVICE	REASON
Orientation for new students (1 <sup>st</sup> year students)	
Vacation schools	
Face-to-face tutorials/Saturday classes	
Telephone tutorials	
Interactive video conferencing	

**SECTION C: EVALUATION OF STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES****1. Administrative Support**

Please indicate your choice for **EACH** of the statements below by marking (✓) the box that best represents your opinion.

STATEMENT	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
	1	2	3	4
<b>There is adequate and timely support available at the UNAM Northern Campus for:</b>				
General enquiries and problems regarding admission and registration				
General enquiries about the programmes/ courses offered by the University of Namibia				
Advice on course exemptions, course amendments, change of address and examination centre				
Required queries are directed to the appropriate staff at the University of Namibia				
Facilitation of contact between students and staff at the University of Namibia				
Enquiries about issuing and purchasing of course material (study guides, readers, assignments, prescribed text books)				
Counselling responsive to students' decisions regarding studying through distance mode, enrolment, course choice, withdrawal/dropout				
Guidance and assistance regarding available access and use of Information Communication Technology (ICT), i.e. Internet, e-mail, fax and audio/video facilities				

STATEMENT	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
	1	2	3	4
<b>There is adequate and timely support available at the UNAM Northern Campus for:</b>				
Assistance with available study facilities at the library				
Facilitation and assistance to form study groups among fellow students				
Information about scheduling of vacation schools				
Information about scheduling of face-to-face tutorials				
Information about and facilitation of telephone tutoring				

## 2. Orientation

Did you attend an orientation seminar when you enrolled as a B.Ed student at the UNAM Northern Campus/University of Namibia in Windhoek?

Yes	1
No	2

If your answer to question 2 is **No**, please state your reasons:

.....

.....

.....

.....

**Proceed now with Question 3 (Vacation Schools/Interactive Video Conferencing)**

If your answer to question 2 is **Yes**, please respond to the following statements.

STATEMENT	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
	1	2	3	4
The orientation seminar prepared you to be ready to start with your studies				
The orientation seminar prepared you for your role as a distance education student				
The orientation seminar made you aware of what is expected from you as a distance education student to be successful in your studies				
The orientation seminar made you aware of all the support services available at the UNAM Northern Campus				
The orientation seminar prepared you to be more familiar with what it entails studying through distance mode				
The orientation seminar was useful to clarify doubts and problems pertaining to your study programme				
The orientation seminar motivated and encouraged you to make a success of your studies				

### 3. Vacation Schools/Interactive Video Conference Tutorials

Did you attend Vacation School(s)/Interactive Video Conference Tutorials?

Yes	1
No	2

If your answer to question 3 is **No**, please state your reasons:

.....

.....

.....

**Proceed now with Question 4 (Telephone Tutoring)**

If your answer to question 3 is **Yes**, please respond to the following statements.

STATEMENT	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
	1	2	3	4
Scheduling of vacation schools/ interactive video conference tutorials suits your personal schedule				
The tutor shows sound knowledge of his/her subject matter				
Presentation of the subject matter is systematic, clear and effective				
A variety of teaching methods and visual aids are used to make the course interesting, easy to follow and rewarding				
The overall attendance and punctuality of the tutor during the vacation school/ interactive video conference tutorials is good				



STATEMENT	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
	1	2	3	4
The tutor encourages students to share their experiences and knowledge				
The tutor encourages questions and dialogue with the students				
The tutor is available to render additional consultation and academic support outside vacation school and interactive video conference tutorials				
The tutor supports and allow students to express fears and anxiety about the subject/ course				
The tutorials offered during vacation schools/ interactive video conferencing enhance your understanding of the course material (study guide, reader, prescribed text books, assignments)				
Vacation schools/ interactive video conference tutorials are useful to clarify doubts and problems pertaining to the subject/ course				
Vacation schools/ interactive video conference tutorials lessen feelings of loneliness and builds confidence				
Vacation schools/ interactive video conference tutorials allows you to be better prepared for examinations				

**4. Telephone Tutoring**

Do your Regional Academic Coordinator and the Regional Administrative and Student Support Officer (RASSO) encourage you to make use of telephone tutoring to obtain academic support from your marker-tutors/ face-to-face tutors?

Yes	1
No	2

Do you make use of tele-conferencing services at the UNAM Northern campus to obtain academic support from your marker-tutors/ face-to-face tutors?

Yes	1
No	2

If your answer is **No**, please state why you did not make use of this service?

.....

.....

.....

.....

If your answer is **Yes**, did you benefit from this service?

Yes	1
No	2

Did you contact/phone your marker-tutor or face-to-face tutor, using your own/public phone?

Yes	1
No	2

If your answer is **No**, please state why you did not make use of this service?

.....

.....

.....

.....

If your answer is **Yes**, did you benefit from this service?

Yes	1
No	2

**5. Face-to-face Tutoring/Saturday classes**

Did you attend face-to-face tutorials at the UNAM Northern Campus?

Yes	1
No	2

If your answer to question 5 is **No**, please state your reasons:

.....

.....

.....

.....

**Proceed now with Question 6 (Tutor Marking)**

If your answer to question 5 is **Yes**, please respond to the following statements.

STATEMENT	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
	1	2	3	4
Scheduling of face-to-face tutorials suits your personal schedule				
The tutor shows sound knowledge of his/her subject matter				
Presentation of the subject matter is systematic, clear and effective				
A variety of teaching methods and visual aids are used to make the course interesting, easy to follow and rewarding				
The overall attendance and punctuality of the tutor during the face-to-face tutorials is good				
The tutor encourages students to share their experiences and knowledge				
The tutor encourages questions and dialogue with the students				
The face-to-face tutor is available to render additional consultation and academic support outside scheduled face-to-face tutorials				
The face-to-face tutorials are useful to clarify doubts and problems pertaining to the subject/ course				
The face-to-face tutorials enhance your understanding of the course material (study guide, reader, prescribed textbook, assignments)				

STATEMENT	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
	1	2	3	4
Face-to-face tutorials are useful to clarify doubts and problems pertaining to the course				
Face-to-face tutorials allows you to be better prepared for examinations				

6. The following statements are set to get your opinion regarding the quality of marking done by your marker-tutor(s) [tutor/lecturer who marks your assignments]

STATEMENT	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
	1	2	3	4
Assignments are useful and an important teaching and learning device				
Assignments are vague and difficult to attempt				
Assignments are fair, testing the material that have been taught				
Comments and feedback on assignments are comprehensive, detailed and helpful				
Comments and feedback on assignments are constructive and relevant				
The nature of the tutor's comments on assignments are encouraging				
No comments and feedback are given				

STATEMENT	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
	1	2	3	4
The tutor is available for consultation to provide academic support to complete assignments				
The turn-around-time of assignments (time span between submitting an assignment and receiving tutor-marked assignment (TMA) is adequate				

**SECTION D**

**The following questions are set to get your overall opinion regarding the quality of support services provided by the Centre for External Studies at the University of Namibia’s Northern Campus.**

1. What is your opinion regarding the provision of student support services at the UNAM Northern Campus?

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2. Do you regard student support services as being an advantage to a distance education student?

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3. Which one of the available student support services do you regard as the most effective and useful and why? (Which of these services do you think helped you most with your studies? Why?)

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4. Which one of the available student support services do you regard as the least effective and why?

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5. Can you be successful in your studies without making use of the available student support services?

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6. What do you do when you feel isolated/lonely as a distance education student?

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7. Do you feel you are a UNAM student? Do you feel a “sense of belonging” even though you are a distance education student?

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8. Which one of the available student support services do you often make use of and why?

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9. What problems, if any, did you experience in being able to use the following student support services?

Administrative Support

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Orientation

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Vacation Schools/Interactive video-conference tutorials

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Telephone tutorials

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Face-to-face tutorials/Saturday classes

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Tutor-marked assignments

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Use of library facilities

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Use of internet and e-mail services

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Other (please specify)

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10. In your opinion, do you regard the provision of student support services as an attempt to meet the needs of distance education students?

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11. What student support service(s) do you need which are not presently being addressed?

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## APPENDIX C

### MAP OF REGIONAL CENTRES

